No. 91 • April 2023
www.international-piano.com

# International Piano

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

CELEBRATING THE PIANO'S MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

## YEOL EUM SON

**Bringing style and finesse to Mozart**

## PLAYING FROM ANOTHER AGE

**The unique pianism of Ignaz Friedman**

## LIVING WITH LISZT

**Pioneering pianist Leslie Howard at 75**

INSIDE
6 PAGES OF
FREE
SHEET MUSIC

£6.95

**PLUS** Celebrating Gramophone's centenary with a selection of classic features from the archive on pianists from Rachmaninov to Perahia

VISIT…

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

DOWNLOAD MORE MAGAZINES AT HTTPS://FREEMAGAZINES.TOP

epta

BELGIUM
WALLONIE-BRUXELLES

EUROPEAN
PIANO TEACHERS
ASSOCIATION

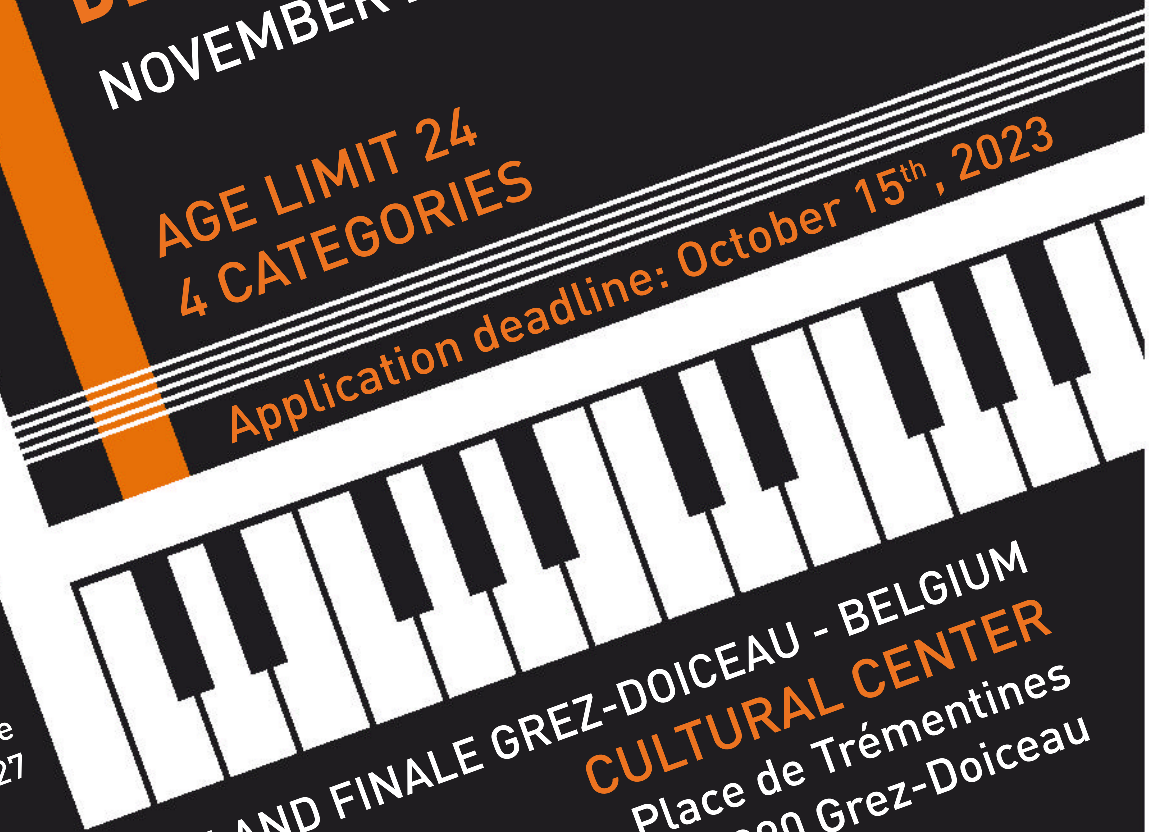
16th PIANO COMPETITION

# RENCONTRES INTERNATIONALES DES JEUNES PIANISTES

NOVEMBER 21ST TO 26TH, 2023

AGE LIMIT 24
4 CATEGORIES

Application deadline: October 15th, 2023



INFOS
www.epta-belgium.be
competition@telenet.be
Fax:+32 23.80.08.27

SELECTION AND FINALE GREZ-DOICEAU - BELGIUM
CULTURAL CENTER
Place de Trémentines
1390 Grez-Doiceau

Member of the
Alink-Argerich
Foundation

*In partnership with the Municipality,*
*the Music Academy of Grez-Doiceau and the Music Academy of Wavre*

Le Brabant wallon
MAENE
Académie de Wavre
point d'orgue
ibis
PHARMACIESERVAIS
Académie de Musique et des Arts de la Parole
Commune de Grez-Doiceau

**5 EDITORIAL**
Partnerships in print and on record

**6 LETTERS**
Your thoughts and comments

**7 NEWS & NOTES**
Apple launches its new dedicated classical music app, Apple Music Classical; Hyperion Records is bought by Universal Music Group; Filipo Gorini announces an unusual tour of seven cities; latest studio news and some albums to look forward to

**10 ONE TO WATCH**
The Hungarian pianist Misi Boros makes a strong impression

**12 IN BLACK AND WHITE**
The tradition of leading politicians who also play the piano extends beyond Paderewski

**14 ILL-TEMPERED CLAVIER**
Charivari welcomes a talent show on a UK television channel that focuses on amateurs playing the piano

**28 PERSONAL TOUCH**
Having recorded Rachmaninov – the Second Concerto with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra as well as solo works – Kirill Gerstein talks about a composer who remains misunderstood

**40 INSTRUMENT REVIEW**
A look at Casio's latest digital piano

**41 RETURNING TO THE PIANO**
VI – Shape and rhythm (Part 2)

**SHEET MUSIC**

**45 Repertoire rarity**
Byrd's The Carman's Whistle

**52 RETURNING TO MOZART**
Robert Levin resumes his cycle of Mozart's piano concertos with the AAM

**54-61 NEW RELEASES**
CDs, books and sheet music

**62 IN CONCERT**
A round-up of London recitals

**66 MUSIC OF MY LIFE**
The Irish pianist and composer Philip Martin picks his favourite recordings

MARCO BORGGREVE

TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

MARCO BORGGREVE

## SPECIAL FEATURES

**16 YEOL EUM SON**
As this young Korean pianist's recording of Mozart's complete piano sonatas is issued, she talks engagingly with Shirley Apthorp

**21 GOLDEN-AGE FREEDOM**
Bryce Morrison explores the legacy of Ignaz Friedman

**24 LESLIE HOWARD AT 75**
Colin Clarke meets a pianist whose career has been focused on the music of Liszt

**32 GRAMOPHONE AT 100**
A special archive section exploring some highlights of Gramophone's piano coverage over the last century

19. - 26. August 2023
Schloss vor Husum

# Rarities of Piano Music

**Daniel Grimwood**
**Matinée** (Jeremy Nicholas)
**Vadym Kholodenko**
**Fabian Müller**
**Andrey Gugnin**
**Tanya Gabrielian**
**Jean-Frédéric Neuburger**
**Beatrice Berrut**
**Alfonso Soldano**

**Piano works by**

| | |
|---|---|
| Balakirev | Stravinsky |
| S. Menter | Glazounov |
| Blumenfeld | Weber |
| Rachmaninoff | Godowsky |
| Bortkiewicz | J. Zarembski |
| L. Spohr | A.Henselt |
| J. Dillon | Zemlinsky |

**Ticket sale & festival information**
Schloss vor Husum
25813 Husum
Tel. +49 4841 8973-130
www.piano-festival-husum.com

**Information & accommodation**
Tourist Information Husum
Tel. +49 4841 – 89 87 -0
www.husum-tourismus.de

Cultural Partner
NDR kultur Deutschlandfunk Kultur

---

OUT ON NAXOS

NAXOS

# PETRENKO & GILTBURG

## NEW ALBUM ON NAXOS

BRAND NEW

NAXOS
BEETHOVEN
Piano Concertos Nos. 3 and 4
Vasily Petrenko
Boris Giltburg
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

8.574152

**AVAILABLE TO BUY NOW**

## CELEBRATING RACHMANINOV ON NAXOS

NEW

RACHMANINOV
Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 4
Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini
Boris Giltburg
Brussels Philharmonic · Vassily Sinaisky

8.574528

RACHMANINOV
PIANIST AND CONDUCTOR
150 YEARS
Legendary Recordings, 1919–1942
The Philadelphia Orchestra
Leopold Stokowski • Eugene Ormandy

8.109001

**AVAILABLE THIS MONTH**

Distributed by Naxos UK: www.naxosmusic.co.uk

NAXOS
NAXOS MUSIC UK

# Partnerships – old and new

When *International Piano* first launched in the autumn of 1997, it was as a quarterly magazine (*International Piano Quarterly*, or *IPQ* as it was fondly known), edited by *Gramophone*'s then Deputy Editor Harriet Smith – still a *Gramophone* writer today – as a specialist offshoot. As *Gramophone* changed owners, so too did *International Piano*, losing its 'Q' when the magazine went bi-monthly. For most of its life *International Piano* existed quite separately from *Gramophone*, but when the Mark Allen Group acquired *International Piano* from Rhinegold in 2018, they were reunited under the same roof once more, a bond that has now become more formal and which we mark with a special celebration of *Gramophone*'s centenary, drawing on its unique archive of writing on the piano. Once again, the role of editing *International Piano* is undertaken by *Gramophone*'s Deputy Editor. A lot has changed in 25 years, but to some extent things have come full circle.

I would like to extend my thanks to Owen Mortimer, who edited *International Piano* with conviction and tenacity for eight years. Owen has been a tireless advocate for the magazine and for those who interact with it – manufacturers, festivals, educational establishments, and of course pianists.

The big news this month, as we report on page 8, is that the independent British label Hyperion has been bought by Universal. When the story broke, some expressed concern that Hyperion's reputation for championing an eclectic and adventurous repertoire would be compromised. Universal's commitment to retain Hyperion as a freestanding label with its own A&R identity has since been reaffirmed, the staff – not least Managing Director Simon Perry – at Hyperion remaining in place. We should remember that since 2009 Ondine has been owned by Naxos, and since 2021 Channel Classics by Outhere; both labels continue to be driven by their founders and retain their distinctive identities, even if the purse strings are ultimately controlled elsewhere. If Universal do exercise a power of veto on any recording projects, for financial reasons, this is unlikely to affect the label's piano recordings, which are high profile and successful, and offer good value. For many, the most significant change will come when Hyperion's catalogue is made available for streaming. Let's hope that a new generation of listeners explore this treasure trove of great recordings.

**Tim Parry, *Editor***

*International Piano* offers a rich mix of inspiration and guidance to pianists and piano fans around the world, from dedicated amateurs and students to professional pianists, teachers and aficionados.

Celebrating the piano in all its forms, including the fortepiano and digital keyboards, each edition of our magazine is packed with interviews, features, news and reviews showcasing the top artists of today and yesteryear. Practical advice for players runs the gamut from articles on technique and repertoire to learning resources and study courses, plus the latest developments in piano technology.

Our goal is to draw together the fascinating strands that make the piano such a popular instrument, enhancing every reader's knowledge and supporting those who strive to master its challenges.

**INTERNATIONAL PIANO PARTNERSHIPS**

LONDON PIANO FESTIVAL

THE GILMORE

HASTINGS INTERNATIONAL PIANO CONCERTO COMPETITION

International Piano

@IP_mag fb.com/internationalpiano

EDITORIAL
**Phone** +44 (0)20 7333 1702
**Editor** Tim Parry
tim.parry@markallengroup.com
**Contributing Editor** Jeremy Nicholas
**Sub-Editor** David Threasher
**Design** Hal Bannister
**Music Typesetting** Beautiful Setting

EDITORIAL BOARD
Iain Burnside, Peter Froundjian, Adam Gatehouse, Stephen Hough, Simon Markson, Charles Owen, Roberto Prosseda, Johan Sandback, Mike Spring

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BACK ISSUES
**Phone** UK 0800 137201
Overseas +44(0)1722 716997
**Email** subscriptions@markallengroup.com
**Subscriptions Manager** Bethany Foy
**UK Subscription Rate** £66

ADVERTISING
**Phone** +44(0)207 333 1741
**Title Manager** Maria Barnes
maria.barnes@markallengroup.com
**Production Controller** Daniela Di Padova
+44 (0)20 7333 1727
daniela.dipadova@markallengroup.com

PUBLISHING
**Phone** +44(0)20 7738 5454
**Marketing & Events Director** Tony Hill
**Head of Marketing** John Barnett
**Group Institutional Sales Manager** Jas Atwal
**Production Director** Richard Hamshere
**Circulation Director** Sally Boettcher
**Editorial Director** Martin Cullingford
**Managing Director** Paul Geoghegan
**Chief Operating Officer** Jon Benson
**Chief Executive Officer** Ben Allen
**Chairman** Mark Allen

MA Music Leisure & Travel
Part of
Mark Allen
**www.markallengroup.com**

**International Piano**, ISSN 2042-0773,
(USPS 7295) is published monthly by
MA Music, Leisure & Travel Ltd,
St Jude's Church,
Dulwich Road,
London SE24 0PB,
United Kingdom.

The US annual subscription price is $98. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named WN Shipping USA, 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica NY 11431.
US Postmaster: Send address changes to International Piano, WN Shipping USA, 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA

Subscription records are maintained at MA Music, Leisure & Travel Ltd, Unit A, Buildings 1-5 Dinton Business Park, Catherine Ford Road, Dinton, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP3 5HZ. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

© MA Music, Leisure and Travel Ltd, 2023.
All rights reserved. No part of *International Piano* may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without prior written permission of the publishing director. The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the editor. The presence of advertisements in *International Piano* implies no endorsement of the products or services offered. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of statements in this magazine but we cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions, or for matters arising from clerical or printers' errors, or an advertiser not completing their contract. We have made every effort to secure permission to use copyright material. Where material has been used inadvertently or we have been unable to trace the copyright owner, acknowledgement will be made in a future issue.

Please read our privacy policy by visiting **http://privacypolicy.markallengroup.com**.
This will explain how we process, use and safeguard your data.

Printed in the UK by
Pensord, Pontllanfraith, Blackwood, NP12 2YA

Newstrade distribution by Seymour 020 7429 4000

recycle
When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

Write to *International Piano*, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB, email **international.piano@markallengroup.com** or tweet **@IP_mag**. Star letters will receive a free CD from Hyperion's best-selling Romantic Piano Concertos series

hyperion
www.hyperion-records.co.uk
SPONSORED BY
**HYPERION RECORDS**

## ★ RACHMANINOV'S CHOPIN FUNERAL MARCH

Thank you for Robert Matthew-Walker's informative article *Arms of Steel, Heart of Gold* in March issue of IP (page 14), which I enjoyed.

It is of interest to note Mr Matthew-Walker's comment that Rachmaninov approached all music from a composer's viewpoint and with regards to Chopin's Sonata No 2, that if 'Rachmaninov could cut Beethoven, he could alter Chopin, making a *fortissimo* recapitulation in the third movement of his February 1930 recording, rather than the *pianissimo* Chopin indicated.'

I would like to think that Rachmaninov's approach in taking the recapitulation at *ff* rather than *pp* had more to do with performance practice and tradition than with approaching it from a composer's viewpoint.

In Moriz Rosenthal's account of an Anton Rubinstein recital in 1885 in Bratislava (then Pressburg), Rosenthal recalled this of Rubinstein's performance of the third movement of Chopin's Piano Sonata No 2:

> '… the Funeral March had already started in a distant *pianissimo*, which then swelled through *piano*, *mezzo-forte*, *forte*, and *fortissimo* with an orchestral power. The funeral procession came to a halt. A melody of pious childhood faith rose (how dreadfully it is betrayed in the inferno tragedy of the fourth movement!), and then again the Funeral March, but now in triple *fortissimo* which descended uniformly, all too uniformly, gliding into *piano* and *pianissimo*. No doubt this was a funeral cortège passing.'

Rachmaninov thus was not the only pianist who played the recapitulation at *fortissimo* (or triple *fortissimo*) rather than *pp* as Chopin indicated.

In fact, Grigory Ginzburg did that same, as can be heard in a live recital from January 1959 (which can be heard online). Perhaps, then, Rachmaninov (and others who do so) was just following a performance practice started by Anton Rubinstein.

Moriz Rosenthal's account can be found in an article titled 'The Night Rubinstein Played in Bratislava' in the August 1971 issue of *Stereo Review*. The article was made available to the magazine by Charles Rosen through the kindness of Mrs Oscar Kanner, a cousin of Rosenthal and the widow of his stepson. The article was originally in German and freely translated by Fritz A Kuttner.

Yours sincerely,
**Phan Ming Yen**
*Singapore*

PIANO CLASSICS

PIANO CLASSICS NEW RELEASES

1 CD
Chopin
Works for Piano & Orchestra
Ekaterina Litvintseva *piano* • Vahan Mardirossian *conductor*
Czech Chamber Philharmonica
Orchestra Pardubice
PCL10142

1 CD
Albéniz
Suite Espanola Op.47 & 49
Sebastian Stanley *piano*
PCL10262

PCL10169
1 CD
Stravinsky
Piano Music
Emanuele Delucchi

PCL10243
1 CD
Takahashi & Nishimura
Piano Music
Lukas Huisman

PCL10258
1 CD
Glinka Revisited
Piano Music
Viacheslav Shelepov

PCL10266
1 CD
Medtner
Piano Sonatas Op.24 Nos. 1 & 2
Six Fairy Tales Tales Op.51
Dina Parakhina

PCL10171
1 CD
Paul Dukas
Complete Piano Music
Vincenzo Maltempo

PCL10273
1 CD
Pärt Lamentate
Pedro Piquero *piano*
Orguesta de Extremadura
Álvaro Albiach *conductor*

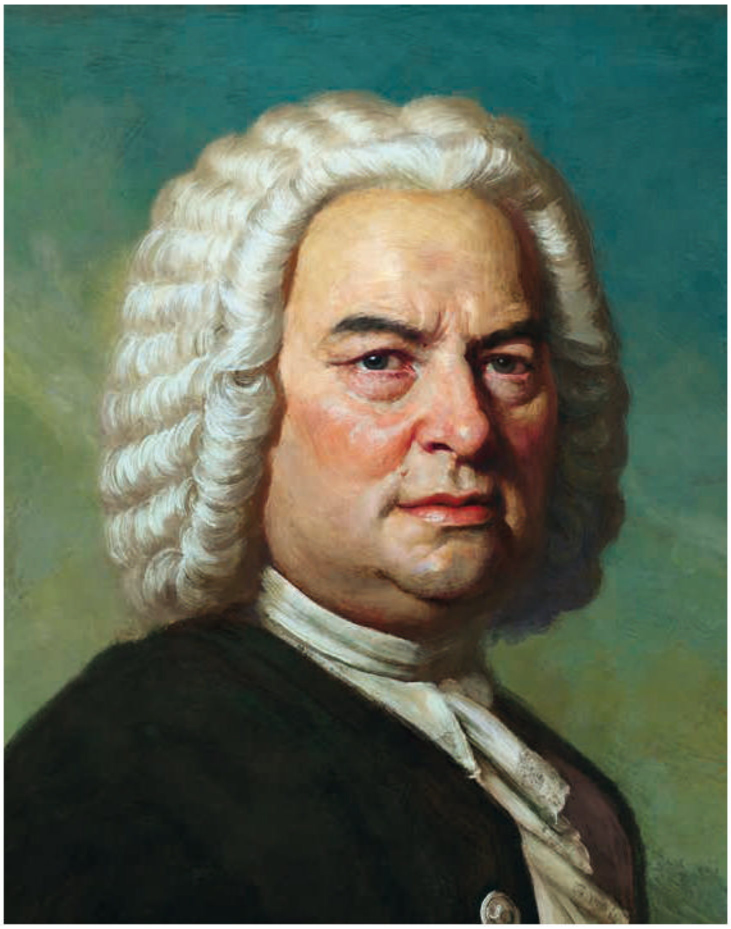
www.piano-classics.com

# Apple's classical app launched

Apple Music has massively boosted its streaming experience for classical audiences with the launch a new app dedicated to the genre. Called Apple Music Classical, it offers access to the world's largest classical music catalogue of over five million tracks in the highest audio quality (up to 192 kHz/24 bit Hi-Res Lossless), with thousands of recordings in immersive spatial audio.

The app has sought to address a frequent frustration for streaming listeners about the way many such services present classical track data and search returns, and getting this right has been a significant part of the product's creation. Listeners will be able to search by composer, work, artist, or even catalogue number, and find specific recordings instantly. It will also offer 'hundreds of curated playlists, thousands of exclusive albums, composer biographies, deep-dive guides for many key works, intuitive browsing features and much more'. Aiming to appeal to both long-standing classical listeners and new discoverers, the app will offer exploration by era – and this commitment to user-friendly and engaging content even extends to specially commissioned composer portraits blending historically appropriate colour palettes and artistic references (such as the illustration of Bach shown here). Meanwhile, Apple is working with some of the world's leading classical musicians and institutions to offer listeners 'new, unique and exclusive content and recordings at launch and beyond'.

Apple Music Classical will require a subscription to Apple Music and will be available worldwide (except for China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan with those regions following). It will be available for all iPhone models running iOS 15.4 or later, with Apple Music Classical for Android coming soon.



# Gorini's city tour earns acclaim

Filippo Gorini has been awarded the biennial Franco Buitoni Award – worth £25,000 – in recognition of his forthcoming Sonata for 7 Cites project. The young Italian's prize-winning project is the result of a 'seeking a more meaningful and fulfilling way to share his music-making with audiences and communities,' say the organisers.

Over the course of a year – 2025/26 – Gorini will spend a month in each of seven cities around the world as well as his home country. Each residency will have at its core a significant recital and concerto performance with that city's symphony orchestra at the beginning and end of the period, while the rest of his time will be devoted to creative local partnerships with free educational, mentoring and philanthropic activity, plus performances in more unusual venues beyond the city centre for audiences who are not regular concert-goers. Confirmed locations so far include Milan, Vancouver and Vienna.

'The idea is simple: instead of constantly travelling from one concert venue to another, I want to focus on each city for a full month and offer as much as I can to the local community in that time, with the aim of leaving a deeper impression than would be possible with a single performance,' said Gorini. He will also premiere a specially commissioned sonata in each city, with works already set to come from Federico Gardella, Stefano Gervasoni, Oscar Jockel and Michelle Agnes Magalhaes.

We featured Filippo Gorini as a One to Watch in 2020, and he can be heard on three recordings for the Alpha label: Bach's *The Art of Fugue* (2021), as well as Beethoven's 'Diabelli' Variations (2017) and Piano Sonatas Opp 106 and 111 (2020).

# New home for Hyperion

Hyperion Records has been bought by Universal Music Group, home of Deutsche Grammophon and Decca. The Award-winning British label was founded by Ted Perry in 1980 and in the decades since has built one of the most revered catalogues of piano recordings, drawing on some of the finest and most distinctive pianists of our age, including Stephen Hough, Marc-André Hamelin, Angela Hewitt and Steven Osborne, and more recently Pavel Kolesnikov and Andrey Gugnin – while among its most impressive accomplishments is a mammoth 99-disc box-set of the complete piano music of Liszt recorded by Leslie Howard.

Hyperion Records will remain a standalone recording label within Universal Music UK, retaining its unique identity, with Simon Perry continuing as its Managing Director. Dickon Stainer, President and CEO, Global Classics & Jazz, UMG, reinforced the point, saying: 'Hyperion is a jewel of a label, and we are committed to continuing the magnificent work done by the Perry family and to preserving and building on the special place Hyperion occupies in the hearts of artists and music fans alike.'

Adding an artist's perspective, Stephen Hough said: 'I started recording for Hyperion when digital technology was barely a decade old – in the early 1990s. It has been an amazing home for me over the past 30 years, allowing me to record dozens of albums, from the obscurest repertoire to mainstream classics to my own music. That Universal wants to take the label under its umbrella alongside DG and Decca is great news as it will give the widest possible exposure and support for Hyperion's catalogue of treasures.'

In addition, the pianist Angela Hewitt said: 'Almost 30 years ago we began our journey together, and you have been the greatest support and main "creator" of my career, and for that I am eternally grateful. It has been a career built on integrity, quality, and inspiration, and with Ted, and then Simon, I have felt nothing but respect for both me and the music. I am proud to have been associated with Hyperion for so long, and of the catalogue we have built together. It is good to know that my Mozart piano sonata cycle will be finished and that there are other projects that will go forward as well. I completely understand why Hyperion has changed hands at this point and am thrilled that Simon Perry remains part of the team. Here's to the next chapter in the life of a brilliant record label!'

Angela Hewitt: proud to be associated with Hyperion

## STUDIO NEWS

**Alexandre Kantorow** has recorded two new solo album for BIS. In the autumn his final Brahms piano sonata recording will be issued, with the C major Sonata No 1, coupled (as with his recital programme reviewed on page 62) with Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy* and songs transcribed by Liszt. The second album will be released next year, containing Liszt (the *Dante* Sonata and other works), Schumann (Piano Sonata No 1) and Scriabin.

**Andrey Gugnin** – who won the Sydney Piano Competition in 2016 and has since impressed with his recordings, not least an outstanding Shostakovich album – goes into the studio next month to record a Grieg album for Hyperion. The programme will include two books of *Lyric Pieces* (Book 3, Op 43, and Book 7, Op 62), the *Holberg Suite* and the G minor Ballade, Op 24.

In April, **Jean-Efflam Bavouzet** will record the latest volume of his Mozart Piano Concertos cycle with Manchester Camerata and Gábor Takács-Nagy. This will feature three concertos from 1782, Nos 11-13, along with the Overture to *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, K384, and is expected to be issued in the autumn.

Later this month, also for Chandos, **Peter Donohoe** goes to Potton Hall in Suffolk to record a Spanish-themed album, including works by Granados and Albéniz, due for release next year.

# international Piano GUIDE TO INSTRUMENTS & ACCESSORIES 2023

FREE GUIDE

international Piano GUIDE TO

www.international-piano.com

INSTRUMENTS & ACCESSORIES

2023

Our **new digital guide showcases instruments from the world's top manufacturers**, ranging from digital pianos for use in homes and studios to professional concert grands that grace the stages of major international venues.

**Profiles of 15 leading brands** are complemented by features, reviews and interviews highlighting the latest developments in piano design and technology.

**Read for FREE at www.international-piano.com/guide23**

# Dedication and determination

LAJOS KALMÁR

Still only 20, the Hungarian pianist Misi Boros has come a long way since winning a television talent show at the age of 11. **Stephen Pritchard** is among his many admirers

Television in Hungary has for a long time fostered interest and enthusiasm in classical music, with talent competitions among young players popular in that musical nation. Back in 1964 a certain András Schiff won such a contest at the age of 11, and history might just have repeated itself in 2014, when pianist Misi Boros took top prize in the show *Virtuosos,* also at the tender age of 11.

Now 20 and studying at the Munich Hochschule, Boros has been selected as the face of this year's Hungarian National Talent Programme, which supports 300,000 young Hungarians in all walks of life who show exceptional promise. His commitment to music and the piano is seen as a supreme example of what young people can achieve through dedication and determination. He says he tries to send a simple message: 'Let's love what we do and work, work and work.'

That strong work ethic has seen him come a long way since he won the contest, at the age of 13 releasing his debut album of works by Scarlatti, Bach, Beethoven and Chopin, of which the Hungarian pianist and conductor Tamás Vásáry said: 'This is more than playing well on piano, or good music. This is art, true art.'

International competition success followed in Rome, Milan and Paris and he won the piano prize at the Verbier Festival last year. Already he has played with 20 orchestras under 22 conductors in cities as widespread as New York, Paris, Tokyo, Beijing, Stockholm, Islamabad and São Paulo.

That *Virtuosos* series had some heavyweight judges, including Professor András Batta, then rector of the prestigious Liszt Academy and now head of the House of Music, Budapest's spectacular new purpose-built venue for all forms of music. Recalling those early days, he said: 'Misi is a natural musician. He revealed a deep soul, even at the age of 11.'

Batta confessed that he cried when he heard Boros play. 'I had an image of the young Mozart. I will never forget it. Of course, as children grow they can lose their talent, but Misi's playing seems to mature along with his age. And he's a great communicator, taking the audience with him, talking to them, explaining the music and his approach. I was driving recently and some Chopin came on the radio. It was so deeply considered and I was so pleased and surprised when it turned out to be Misi playing.'

Chopin and Brahms feature on Boros's latest solo album, entitled *Inspirations*, released this spring on the Hungaroton label (producer Zsuzsa Dvorák). Boros explains: 'I wanted to record in a way that would sound fresh and new. I want the recording to feel as though this is the first time someone has ever played the piece. No doubt I will change the way I play over the next 10 years but I hope the core of what I do will remain the same. I always respond to new environments, to the different acoustic of each hall in which I play. I find it inspires me, while always mindful of the dictum: "hear the music, not the instrument". With the disarming confidence of youth he says he aims to 'help Chopin say what he hesitates to say'.

He finds Brahms and Chopin – 'two disparate faces of Romanticism' – especially inspiring and opens his album with Brahms's *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel*, Op 24, before launching into colourful interpretations of different genres from Chopin's output: waltz, nocturne, impromptu, ballade and berceuse.

In the concert hall there is something of the young Víkingur Ólafsson about Boros: controlled, lyrical and technically assured. He's not ashamed to show his deep emotional commitment to the music. For example, there's an almost unbearable tenderness to his reading of the opening of the Nocturne in F major, Op 15 No 1. And like Ólafsson, he addresses the audience, explaining why he has chosen certain pieces, their relation to each other and what they mean to him. They lap it up: in Hungary, this young man is already a star. We are told that András Schiff is an admirer and that international management companies are showing an interest in representing him. That work ethic is paying off. **IP**

LAJOS KALMÁR

*A deep soul: Misi Boros displays a degree of maturity that bodes well for further development*

**IN BLACK AND WHITE**

# Today Czerny, tomorrow the world!

Numerous political leaders played the piano in their spare time, some more seriously than others. **Benjamin Ivry** investigates

It is well known that Paderewski was a keyboard superstar whose intermittent forays into politics were motivated by patriotism. Perhaps less well known is that many other full-time national rulers have displayed a similar obsession with the piano. One such was the German chancellor Helmut Schmidt, subject of Reiner Lehberger's *Helmut Schmidt at the Piano* (*Helmut Schmidt am Klavier,* in German; Hoffmann und Campe). Known as a cool technocrat who shunned imaginative flights (he opined 'If you have visions, time to see the doctor'), Schmidt let loose at the piano. Practising doggedly, Schmidt had previously rented pianos and studied the organ when serving as a Nazi soldier during the Second World War.

As a record collector, Schmidt likewise eschewed his measured habits, Lehberger informs us, by overindulging in Glenn Gould albums. And when Schmidt recorded relatively unchallenging parts in concertos by Mozart and Bach, purportedly as a civic example to encourage fellow aspirants despite his own self-evaluated 'mediocre talent', he was surrounded by the experienced professionals Christoph Eschenbach and Gerhard Oppitz. The results, although a trifle standoffish, remain in print today (on DG).

More modest in performance ambitions was US President Harry Truman, who imposed piano lessons on his entire family as an essential element of civilised discourse and conduct. Having spent his teenage years practising for two hours daily before school, starting at 5am, Truman frequently mentioned that his career options were between politics or employment as a pianist in a whorehouse, as he lacked the talent required for a professional keyboard career – he joked that the two occupations had their similarities.

*Richard Nixon at the piano in 1962*

In 1900, when Paderewski visited Kansas City, Missouri, Truman's teacher, Mrs EC White, took the teenager backstage for advice about technique. Truman emerged with an added reverence for the piano and those who played it, or as he put it, 'music and what it does for people'. In later life Truman amassed a collection of piano records now preserved in his Missouri home, today a museum. These include famed virtuosos including Rubinstein, Horowitz, Bauer, Lhevinne, Curzon, Małcużyński, Arrau, Brailowsky, Hofmann, Gieseking and Casadesus, among others.

Truman also collected recordings of pianists neglected by posterity, such as the short-lived Italian-American Vera Franceschi, a pupil of Bauer and Carl Friedberg, and the Canadian-born Zadel Skolovsky, as well as posh café-society pianists such as Cy Walter and Burrus Williams, a fixture in venues around Washington DC. Intriguingly, Truman's hoard also includes one-off rarities: private discs by the playwright Thornton Wilder as keyboard accompanist in Richard Strauss songs, and performances by the Hungarian philosopher of science and one-time piano prodigy Ervin László. These sympathetically diverse voices matched Truman's own varied repertoire of tenderly nostalgic melodies. At social events Truman would play Paderewski's Minuet in G, Op 14 No 1, a bit from Mozart's D major Sonata, K311, the jaunty *Black Hawk Waltz* by Mary E Walsh and Henry Bishop's *Home! Sweet Home!*. Shy of recording his performances, Truman nevertheless ventured a few chords when British Pathé cameras were present during a 1952 White House tour (which can be watched on YouTube).

By contrast, the repeated televised keyboard exhibitionism of a younger political rival, Richard Nixon, focused on stridently patriotic items such as *God Bless America* and *Dixie,* especially after the Watergate scandal began to heat up. Like the UK's Edward Heath, Nixon was also a pianist who aspired to conduct orchestras and play the organ, although unlike Heath, Nixon never actually achieved such heights. After losing to JFK in the 1960 presidential election, Nixon appeared on an American TV chat show to play his self-titled *Piano Concerto #1*. This expressed the syrupy sentimentality of a 1930s Hollywood soundtrack in a somewhat flailing effort at social popularity and affirmation.

Nixon's attempts to curry favour at the keyboard have recently been reflected by the even more sinister outings of the Russian dictator Vladimir Putin, accused of war crimes by the International Criminal Court in The Hague. In 2017, to while away time in Beijing while being kept waiting by China's President Xi Jinping, Putin noodled inconsequentially for television cameras on two Stalin-era anthems praising Leningrad and Moscow by Communist lackeys Vasily Solovyov-Sedoy and Tikhon Khrennikov.

The piano, unlike world leaders, never discriminates. **IP**

# GRAMOPHONE

100

## CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF RECORDED CLASSICAL MUSIC

## May 14, 2023, 7pm, Wigmore Hall

*Join us at a special gala concert at London's Wigmore Hall to celebrate Gramophone's centenary, featuring some of today's finest artists:*

**Martin James Bartlett** *piano*

**Jean-Efflam Bavouzet** *piano*

**Bertrand Chamayou** *piano*

**Alina Ibragimova** *violin*

**Malcolm Martineau** *piano*

**Joseph Middleton** *piano*

**Miloš** *guitar*

**Fatma Said** *soprano*

**Carolyn Sampson** *soprano*

**Sean Shibe** *guitar*

**Karim Sulayman** *tenor*

**Emma Sventelius** *mezzo-soprano*

**Cédric Tiberghien** *piano*

*Tickets* are available from the Wigmore Hall box office on 020 7935 2141 or visit wigmore-hall.org.uk*

**Sponsors & Partners**

YAMAHA WIGMORE HALL BIRGIT NILSSON Help Musicians

***Tickets are available to the general public from February 14 and subject to availability**

©Felix Bennett

# The *Ill-Tempered* Clavier

In an age of dumbed-down expectations, **Charivari** overcomes initial scepticism and applauds a mainstream television programme that celebrates our favourite instrument in all its diversity

I beg the forbearance of our UK readers while I explain to our overseas friends the format of a new talent contest on this country's Channel 4. Why, I hear the combined voices of our sophisticated, cultured subscribers ask, are you troubling us with news of a television talent contest? I shall tell you. It is called *The Piano*. Yes, against all the odds, there were five hour-long programmes on a terrestrial commercial channel featuring the piano.

The idea was this: various amateur pianists – ordinary members of the public – were invited (having previously auditioned somewhere, somehow) to display their talents on the concourse of various railway stations. St Pancras (London), Leeds, Glasgow and Birmingham have pianos there for passing passengers to play while waiting for a train or a loved one. Charivari's experience of encountering these platform pianists is that nine times out of ten it will be a teenager intently bashing out a series of unconnected major triads he or she has picked up by ear which have led him/her to believe that he/she is the next Elton John or Mozart. And, indeed, given the level of knowledge and musical education of the average passer-by, they tend to agree, the general rule being that if anyone has the ability to play more than four chords or the first eight bars of *Für Elise* you are *ipso facto* some kind of musical genius.

Those who have been invited by Channel 4 to play on the station pianos were told they were taking part in a documentary. This fiction

*Lang Lang brought class and credibility to a talent show where amateurs of a range of abilities played pianos at UK railway stations* was enhanced by the host of the programme, the ubiquitous and charming Claudia Winkleman, on hand to lend a friendly, funny and professional air to proceedings but who is not known for her prowess on the keyboard. But there was more. Unknown to the participants, apart from being filmed for television, they were secretly being assessed by two judges. At the end of each programme, they revealed themselves and announced that one of the pianists they had just heard would take part in a forthcoming concert at the Royal Festival Hall in London. The judges were Mika, a pop star (unknown to this writer) whom we never see play the piano but who was eloquent, photogenic and hot on what it takes to be a star. His fellow judge, sitting somewhat diffidently beside him, was the great Lang Lang, currently bestriding the piano world like a colossus, sponsoring, endorsing, playing, recording, teaching, inspiring millions, and whose imprimatur is the seal of approval to anything piano-related.

Your correspondent viewed the prospect of all this with a lofty air of disdain, remote control in hand ready to change channels. It turned out differently. Though definitely not aimed at the high end of the classical market, *The Piano* was strangely compelling. Most of the participants chose to play in one popular idiom or another (the series opened with a seriously good bit of boogie-woogie). The oldest was 94, the youngest 12. One player had only started learning the piano during lockdown and, self-taught, had already reached an enviably high standard. A few opted for a classical piece. There was a wonderful moment after someone had played 'Always look on the bright side of life' from *The Life of Brian*, when Mika had to explain to Lang Lang that this was a humorous song sung while a character in the film was being crucified. The look of bemused bafflement on the superstar's face was priceless.

The look on his face when listening to another contestant was something else. Claudia introduced a 13-year-old girl named Lucy who is blind and neurodiverse. She was led to the keyboard and played Chopin's B flat minor Nocturne, Op 9 No 1 – not perfectly, but with such tenderness and unexpected skill that Mika and Lang Lang were, for once, left speechless and the rest of the country – your correspondent included – in tears.

The series was, in short, the most uplifting and positive television talent competition yet. Will it have inspired anyone to take up the piano, or maybe return to it after an absence? My guess is that it will. There is an element of 'Well, if he/she can do it, so can I'. And, because there was such a wide range of age, skill and styles of piano music in the mix, it was an inclusive exercise. It was a shame that none of the 'finalists' included anyone of pensionable age and only one (Lucy) played anything of real musical merit, though it provided a clear demonstration that there is nothing elitist about our favourite instrument.

For the vast majority of viewers, *The Piano* will have been of more interest and greater influence than the BBC's Young Musician competition. Lucy was rightly adjudged the overall winner (more tears) and – oh yes – the four pianists were each given a piano as a prize. Inspirational. **IP**

New Ross Piano Festival 2023

20th–24th September

SAVE THE DATES FOR 2023

This five-day piano festival takes place in the beautiful setting of New Ross, Co. Wexford, under the artistic direction of pianist **Finghin Collins.** Featuring today's most exciting musicians, plus a whole day dedicated to jazz piano!

For more information, visit:

**newrosspianofestival.com**
RTÉ supporting the arts
Wexford County Council
Ireland's Ancient East
Wander Through Time

CHETHAM'S INTERNATIONAL PIANO SUMMER SCHOOL

Chetham's School of Music

Artistic Director: **Murray McLachlan**

*The friendliest piano summer school in the world!*

14–19 August 2023 | CIPSS Part 1
19–24 August 2023 | CIPSS Part 2

Intensive daily individual lessons, workshops, 3 daily faculty recitals, Piano, Junior Piano Course, Adult Amateur, Organ, Harpsichord, Teachers Course, Composition, Jazz, Improvisation and much more.

*Faculty includes:* Katya Apekisheva, Peter Donohoe, Christopher Elton, Margaret Fingerhut, Norma Fisher, Benjamin Frith, Carlo Grante, Paul Harris, Helen Krizos, Piers Lane, John Lenehan, Joanna MacGregor, Leon McCawley, Murray McLachlan, Noriko Ogawa, Charles Owen, Dina Parakhina, Jason Rebello, Martin Roscoe, Penelope Roskell, Sandro Russo, Philip Smith, Graham Scott, Kathryn Stott, Adam Swayne, Michal Tal, Martino Tirimo

Booking opens 1 February 2023

**www.pianosummerschool.com**

# Conversing with Mozart

As her recording of Mozart's complete piano sonatas is released on Naïve, Yeol Eum Son talks to **Shirley Apthorp** about growing up with a close connection to this music

Coming from a pianist who has recorded Nikolai Kapustin, Berg and Stravinsky, it's a startling admission: 'Mozart is my favourite composer,' she declares. That might imply simplicity or conservatism, neither of which could be used to describe Yeol Eum Son. She has worked as a newspaper columnist, published a best-selling book and takes a keen interest in literature and cultural history. Her repertoire interests are broad.

But she insists: 'Mozart is my mother tongue. When you speak your mother tongue, you speak it without really thinking before speaking. And that's how I feel towards it. It's in my blood. Somehow, I just feel very comfortable.'

During Son's South Korean childhood, learning the piano seemed the most normal thing in the world – at least half of her primary school classmates also played. 'It's quite a young tradition for us, but Korean people really love music,' Son says. 'Everyone just sings for any occasion. And also dancing. They love spending time and effort on culture. It's a very, very hipster thing these days.'

*'Mozart's piano music is intensely theatrical: it's all about the characters'*

By the time she was 11 years old, Son had won a prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians; just two years later, she won the Oberlin International Piano Competition. From the Korea National University of Arts she moved to Hanover's Hochschule and the classes of Israeli pianist and pedagogue Arie Vardi; she went on to gain prizes at the Van Cliburn, Viotti, Rubinstein, Kissinger Sommer and Tchaikovsky Competitions.

For many young musicians, the stress of international competitions is a necessary evil on the path to a concert career. 'For me, it was never so stressful,' Son confesses. 'I actually liked a lot of sides of it. For example, I loved listening to other competitors; it was like huge concert experiences.' Not that she sees many alternatives. 'Competitions are really the only way to break in,' she says, 'especially for us Asians. I wish there were more ways to do that. But there is also a shift in attitude going on. Today it's, "Oh, who is this artist?' – you know, instead of "Yeah, another Korean".'

Son also feels a change in general attitude in Europe from when she first arrived. 'It's only been 15 years, but everything has shifted,' she says. 'The way I felt then? As an Asian girl, in most parts of Germany, I didn't feel as secure. But now, as a classical musician, I think whoever you are, wherever you're coming from, it's more about each individual. And that's something that has partly been changed by particular artists.'

Beyond the pressures of competition and career imperatives, the stage has always been Son's safe space. It was the main reason why, from early childhood, she was certain that she wanted to be a pianist. 'I was a shy kid,' she tells me. 'If I had to speak to a person, I would feel really shy. But on stage, I immediately felt comfortable. On stage you're given an opportunity to freely express yourself. And for me it's easier to express myself with something that I can do well, rather than having to explain myself in words.'

She became an avid collector of recordings – her heroes included Wanda Landowska ('It's so free!'), Lili Kraus and Alexis Weissenberg. And she was a deeply committed opera-goer. 'From the age of 13 to around 17, I went to operas at least every second week. Opera was one of the things that I liked very much; I also watched a lot of videos and DVDs.'

Which brings us back to Mozart. 'His piano music is intensely theatrical,' Son explains. 'It's all about the characters; they are a series of little scenes. This is true in all of his music, actually.' For Son, Mozart's music has a transcendence; his operas are written with a God-like affection for his characters, who are portrayed with a unique mix of merciless observation and unjudgemental love. All are human, often deeply flawed, but part of something larger, something more perfect than its individual parts. And Son finds the same humanistic, numinous quality in Mozart's piano works.

Her new six-disc set for Naïve brings all Mozart's piano sonatas together into one lucid set, startling as much for its wit and clarity as it is for its wisdom and warmth. It happened, she says, more or less by accident. 'I was actually having another recording session with a friend, just accompanying. And there were two spare studio days that I could use. I always wanted to record the complete sonatas, so I began to think, "Should I do it?" I knew most of them already.'

She took the plunge; after all, she says, there are not too many sets out there of the complete sonatas. Son had already recorded Mozart's Piano Concerto No 21, K467, with Sir Neville Marriner and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields for Onyx, an album – also including the C major

MARCO BORGGREVE

MARCO BORGGREVE

*Lack of pretension: Yeol Eum Son brings wit and wisdom to Mozart's piano sonatas*

Piano Sonata, K330, a variation set and the C minor Fantasy, K475 – that was received with enthusiasm. *Gramophone* declared it 'an uncommonly fine Mozartian debut', while Guy Rickards in these pages found Son's playing 'sparkling'.

Son and Marriner began discussions about recording a complete set of Mozart's piano concertos. Sadly, this recording was to prove Marriner's last; he died in October 2016. The conductor's idea of a complete recording has remained and expanded in Son's imagination. She admits that she flirts with the idea of recording all of Mozart's keyboard music. 'But it's really hard,' she says. 'There are so many small pieces, some of them not even a page long. Sketches and a lot of musical jokes. I've been looking at the catalogue of his complete works … I'd love to do it.'

Son now has an exclusive recording contact with Naïve; and the complete sonatas certainly set the ball rolling. There is to be another concerto recording with the Hague-based Residentie Orkest, with whom she is artist-in-residence this season, and there are chamber music plans. When not performing or recording as a soloist, Son is Artistic Director of Music in Pyeongchang – a post she has held since 2018 – and performs regularly with violinist Svetlin Roussev and the Modigliani Quartet.

Son still keeps a home in Hanover – 'I went there in 2006 just because I wanted to study with my teacher, but I loved everything, and I still love the place' – as well as in Korea. Australians talk of the 'cultural cringe', a sense that all important artistic developments happen somewhere else, and that only Europe truly has the rights to European music. Do Koreans suffer from a similar kind of impostor syndrome? Was Son's journey to Hanover also part pilgrimage? Her response is typically nuanced: 'At first it felt very different when I came here. As I learned the language, I could see a link to the music – also with the landscapes. But I think we live in a world with a more culturally diverse understanding today. Certainly each orchestra has its own tradition, but I don't think the ethnicities of the musicians play a role in that. It's a tradition of sound.'

Son is curious about historical instruments. She has played a fortepiano and keeps a harpsichord at home, though she says she mostly uses it to play contemporary music. 'It's only really recently that I have cared about which pianos I played – before that I had a more Russian attitude, that we have to play no matter what kind of piano we get. But these days I really enjoy the good pianos.' She throws an inquisitive glance at the 1890s Baltimore-made Knabe that hunches in the corner of our interview space, and seems to reach out and include it in her conversation. The Knabe has an ethereal, silvery upper register and a gruff, musky bass; she can tell just by looking.

'I have two Steinways – one in Germany, one in Korea – but I used an old Bösendorfer for many years. Fifty or sixty years ago, there were many different pianos with many different sounds, and now they are sort of gone. It's a pity, because I love the older sound. I'm not crazy about the new, very industrial sound. Steinway is very regulated. Completely perfect. The older instruments were more uneven, and I wonder if we'll see a swing back to that. I'm curious.'

Despite her close relationship with Mozart, Son has always had a taste for the off-centre. Russian composer Nikolai Kapustin, the Belgian Guillaume Lekeu (who died at the age of 24), Italian Baroque opera composer Baldassare Galuppi, living composers William Hirtz and Albert Schnelzer … the list goes on. 'I loved it when I was in my 20s,' says Son. 'I still love it. There are so many unknown pieces that still need to be presented!'

Does she bring that sense of the new and the exploratory back to her Mozart? Well, she concedes, she plays her own ornaments, which she tries to improvise along the way. 'It's always a lot of fun. I don't write them down. And every time, I have tried to write my own cadenzas, but it's really hard, and especially it's so hard to transpose. The way Mozart does it is unreachable. But my teacher advised me that it's always better to play your own third-class cadenza than the second-class cadenza of someone else!'

She laughs. She has a kind of self-deprecating modesty that translates as a lack of pretension when she plays. There's a transparency, a freshness, a clarity of focus and a straightforward energy that belies the technical wizardry of her playing. If you visit her website, you can scroll through enthusiastically positive reviews until your fingers fall off. The YouTube video of her K467 at the International Tchaikovsky Competition has amassed some 23 million views, probably a record for a live Mozart performance. But Son doesn't have a a TikTok account, and considers herself to be at best a sporadic user of Facebook and Instagram. In a post-Covid world, she says, especially in Korea, she sees a sharper divide between the immensely popular and everyone else; but social-media fame, though perhaps unavoidable, is something that will always interest her less than Mozart.

If she could go back in time to meet Mozart, I wonder what she would ask him. Son hesitates. 'I wonder if I would like to.' Because maybe he was a bit rude? 'Yeah, and I'm also very shy. I often feel that with people like that, I have a better understanding through the music than I would with words.' Yet, she concedes, she would have a question. 'I would like to ask him that if he were living today, with modern instruments, would he write his compositions in more keys? Because the majority of his works are really just in five or six keys. Not even that – three or four keys!'

Of course this remains an unanswerable question. But if you listen closely, you can almost hear Mozart chuckling. **IP**

International Piano

*PRESENTS...*

# Chopin: The Perfect Virtuoso

## His life, music and legacy explored

TIMELESS MASTERPIECES · PEERLESS PERFORMERS · ESSENTIAL RECORDINGS
International Piano
PRESENTS...
www.international-piano.com
CHOPIN
The perfect virtuoso – his life, music and legacy explored
£12.99

**100-PAGE COLLECTORS' EDITION FROM *INTERNATIONAL PIANO'S* ARCHIVE**

- Insights into Chopin's life and major works -

- Exclusive interviews with leading interpreters -

- Collector's guides for key Chopin recordings -

- Recommended books and further resources -

**Order your copy for just £12.99**

Go to **www.magsubscriptions.com/chopin**

Call: **0800 137201 (UK)** or **+44 (0)1722 716997 (Overseas)**

# Golden-age freedom and wizardry

In another instalment of our series examining the legacy of pianists whose playing has elicited mixed reactions, **Bryce Morrison** assesses the unique recordings of Ignaz Friedman

TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

*Ignaz Friedman (1882-1948)*

Unlike Rachmaninov (whose playing Claudio Arrau described as 'disgusting' but who Stephen Kovacevich called 'the King') and Simon Barere (reactions range from William Kapell's 'god damned son-of-a-bitch, how does he do it?' to Virgil Thomson's assessment of his playing as 'too fast for brilliance'), Ignaz Friedman (1882-1948) rarely provoked widely differing reactions. Criticism was invariably given within a context of awe and wonderment – but also in a wider context of the 'golden-age' style of pianism that is so well exemplified by Friedman. This was an age when a pianist's unapologetic freedom encompassed elements of a proudly vaunted fantasy with astonishing technical wizardry. And it is this degree of recreative freedom that arouses controversy.

For the novelist John Fowles this was a time when pianists of outsize gifts roamed the earth, yet this golden-age style has been not so much tarnished as called into question. Jorge Bolet's claim that as a student he listened to the performer first and the composer second (he professed that he went to hear Josef Hofmann above and beyond Beethoven) illustrates an attitude now frowned on in an age that expects a greater sense of balance between creator and re-creator. There are those, for example, who think that a true golden age came later, with a generation of pianists who did not so much replace former greats as alter one's perspective on great piano-playing – pianists including Schnabel, Cortot, Gieseking, Lipatti, Kempff and Michelangeli. Horowitz was an exception and seen as something of a throwback – either 'a master of musical distortion' (Virgil Thomson) or 'the greatest pianist alive or dead' (the English writer on both music and cricket Neville Cardus). Such widely differing pianists turned towards rather than away from the composer; in Ashkenazy's terms, they were more concerned with being a servant than a master of the score, no longer using the piano as a springboard for personal excess. As a corollary, a journalist more recently claimed that the finest of today's pianists (he had in mind Igor Levit among others) have marked a zenith surpassing past glory.

*Here is a radical rethinking of Chopin's most personal and confessional genre*

So much for a wide if necessary view of controversy. Let's move on to Friedman. And let's start on a wholly positive note with his selection of Chopin's mazurkas in performances that continue to have me lost in amazement. Here is a radical rethinking of Chopin's most personal and confessional genre. Here is Friedman at his most inimitable, deeply idiosyncratic but with a compelling stamp of authenticity. And while I would never want to be without Rubinstein's early set of the mazurkas, it is startling and refreshing (initially something of a cold shower) to hear his inwardness and urbanity contrasted so boldly by Friedman's stress on this music's peasant origins. How he makes you long for a complete set of the mazurkas, all of them re-charmed and vitalised with such an extraordinary mix of vigour and finesse.

Elsewhere in Chopin there are further wonders: an endlessly acclaimed E flat major Nocturne, Op 55 No 2 (for Harold Schonberg perfection itself), and the C major Étude, Op 10 No 7 (Chopin's Toccata if you like), for Stephen Hough, as for Horowitz, 'one of the greatest recordings of a Chopin étude ever made'. And if this seems unarguable you will still never tear me away from Horowitz's coaxing and insinuating way or Rubinstein's elegance and sophistication in the Nocturne, or from Cortot's vivacity in the Étude.

Explore further and there is cause for raised eyebrows. Why the hurry in the Berceuse, for Friedman (though less so than for Josef Hofmann) more an étude in transcendental facility than a lullaby? You may admire the improvisatory freedom of his Third Ballade, the way nothing is set in stone, but such larger-than-life gestures will make some Chopin purists blanche. Similar gestures occur again in the A flat major Polonaise, Op 53, as volatile as King Lear ('Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!'), but too much is sacrificed in a wild over-the-top furore, including the kind of ceremonial dignity and heroic strength exemplified by Rubinstein in his many performances over the years.

In Friedman's single concerto offering (the Grieg) there is sudden disappointment, its Nordic poetry reduced to a salon showstopper. There are wilful rhythmic distortions in the central *Adagio* where time and again the listener is jolted this way and that regardless of the composer's lyrical impulse. For some (Jesper Buhl in his note introducing Friedman's complete recordings on Danacord) this is among the most exciting performances of the work on record, while for others (*Gramophone*'s Jed Distler) the inherent simplicity is 'quashed by

TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

*Ignaz Friedman with violinist Bronisław Huberman and cellist Pablo Casals, Bonn, 1927*

*Deeply idiosyncratic: Ignaz Friedman's playing overflows with personality*

TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

Friedman's headstrong, sometimes anarchic treatment'. In the end, despite Friedman's succumbing to superficial show, you are left to regret the absence in his recorded catalogue of other concerto performances, from a repertoire that included Beethoven's Third, Fourth and Fifth concertos and the first concertos of Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Liszt (the three concertos with which he made his sensational debut in Vienna in November 1904).

How you regret, too, that there is just a single example of Friedman in chamber music. His performance of Beethoven's 'Kreutzer' Sonata with the violinist Bronisław Huberman is of an astonishing brio and propulsion, happily breaking with all notions of propriety or convention. Staying with Beethoven, those looking for exaggeration or outdated 'period' characteristics in the 'Moonlight' Sonata will be disappointed. The opening *Adagio* is deeply committed, and if the central *Allegretto* is more limp than buoyant, the finale is delivered in a furious tumult of sound that few could or would equal.

Elsewhere, Friedman took delight in the fashion of the times, the kind of short showpieces that later riled Schnabel ('I am the only pianist who plays a second half of a programme as boring as the first' was his sardonic rejoinder to what he saw as frivolity). Here, whatever sparkles and enchants is present in profusion. What boldly singing *cantabile* in the opening of Weber's *Invitation to the Dance*, and what rollicking brilliance in the dance itself! Friedman is as characterful as he is incomparably deft in Scarlatti-Tausig and charm itself in the Paderewski Minuet (with only an occasional flash of the less likeable aspects of his playing). His own *Music Box*, Op 33 No 3, joins others by Liadov, de Séverac, Villa-Lobos and Stephen Hough as an ear-tickling example of the genre. His selection of Mendelssohn *Songs without Words* has been rightly celebrated, lifting them far beyond their early Victorian origins. You may consider his way with Mendelssohn's E minor Scherzo (from the Op 16 *Caprices*) a pianistic equivalent of Lewis Carroll's White Queen, running to stay in the same place, or find yourself more chivvied than charmed in the Liszt-Busoni *La campanella*, but the klavier-tiger both here and in the Second *Hungarian Rhapsody* is hard to resist (even when you recall Alfred Brendel's insistence that the Rhapsodies are so much more than an opportunity for display).

And there is more, so much more. How grateful we must be for Danacord's brilliantly remastered set of six discs' worth of recordings dating from 1923 to 1941. A nostalgic wish to return to those days of golden-age freedom unconfined by recent notions of correctness – an over-the-shoulder memory of past glory – is entirely understandable. Yet it raises many questions. So many observations on Friedman and others of his generation prompt autocratic assumptions and dogmatism (I am right because I am right), yet any genuine assessment of his playing and its golden-age context must inevitably invoke a blessed controversy. **IP**

# A lifetime with Liszt

As the Australian pianist Leslie Howard turns 75 later this month, he reflects on a career promoting the music of Liszt. **Colin Clarke** catches up with him

Few piano enthusiasts can have escaped Leslie Howard's gargantuan Liszt project for Hyperion, originally issued in separate volumes from 1987 to 1999 and then made available as a 99-CD box-set. Howard is a fascinating musician and a genial, entertaining gentleman with boundless enthusiasm – as I previously found when I worked with him for *International Piano* on Liszt's 'Dante' Sonata.

Howard sounds Australian through and through (although he says his accent's strength varies depending on who he is talking to), so it comes as a surprise to learn – initially from *Wikipedia*, but he confirms it's true – that Howard came to the UK some half a century ago from Melbourne, because of the weather. 'Heat and flies' is the explanation, although he does return for concert appearances. 'Most of the Aussies I know are people I've met in London; and a lot of younger Australian musicians for some obscure reason beat a path to my door.'

Prior to coming to London aged 24, Howard was lucky with his teachers: June McLean (a student of Cortot and his teacher as a boy) and the Englishman Donald Britton at school, who 'filled in the gaps' – chamber music, sight-reading, transposition, organ music, reading figured basses at sight. 'All the proper musicianship stuff which has stood me in good stead ever since. I can pick out a pair of consecutive fifths at about five miles,' jokes Howard. In addition, organ studies meant 'you memorise immediately the shape of the harmonic language in whatever key it is. It's also fun to play all the Chopin Études in as many different keys as you can, then when you go back to the original it seems quite feasible.'

By the time Howard had his first lesson with Britton, he had already been broadcast by ABC (the Australian Broadcasting Corporation). He refers to a bit of a lull at university in Melbourne, but after some lessons from the South African pianist Michael Brymer (a Beethoven fanatic who regularly played the 'Hammerklavier' in the first half of concerts) he went to Italy to study with Guido Agosti (he of the infamous *Firebird* transcription: 'It's a right bastard', quips Howard). Agosti 'was marvellous if he liked you; although if he thought you weren't taking the job seriously, he was dreadful. It's a way of teaching you can't do now; he was a shocker, but if he liked you, he gave you extra time.' While in Siena, Howard also met some English people who prepared the way for his next encounter – with Noretta Conci (who had studied with Michelangeli). Conci brought a sense of adventure back to Howard's approach after a

*Leslie Howard: blending academic rigour and a performer's nous*

MATTHEW GOUGH

ADAM SCOTT

*Championing Liszt: Leslie Howard is in the Guinness Book of Records for the largest recording project undertaken by a solo artist*

period of concentrating on technical aspects. ('Darling, it's a little bit boring … You'll never be able to explain to them how beautiful the piece is if they've lost interest.') Agosti claimed one only needed 'a few books' to learn how to play the piano: the Beethoven/Liszt symphonies, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, the Beethoven sonatas, Chopin's Études and Debussy's *Préludes*.

An enthusiasm for academic thought, which came initially from Britton and was shared with Agosti, informs Howard's Liszt project, defining its meticulous attention to detail. Many works are presented in all their multiple versions – Liszt was an inveterate reviser who endlessly returned to his compositions, either refining or exploring new directions, so that works frequently exist in early drafts and later revisions. Unlike, say, Chopin or Brahms, who routinely destroyed their working copies, the state of Liszt's manuscripts is often complex and confusing. Perhaps Howard's enthusiasm can be more accurately defined as an insatiable curiosity – illustrated by his bringing to Agosti Tchaikovsky's G major Piano Sonata, which Agosti hadn't taught since 1947. Having funnelled that curiosity into Liszt's music over decades, the results are awe-inspiring in their scope and expertise. (It is easy to overlook that Howard also recorded Liszt's 12 symphonic poems in the composer's own two-piano versions with Mattia Ometto for Brilliant Classics.)

***Perhaps Howard's enthusiasm can be more accurately defined as an insatiable curiosity***

As to Howard's editorial work (and with the 'Dante' Sonata he demonstrates just how much thought goes into this), he has produced nine volumes of new Urtext Liszt scores for Edition Peters, including the B minor Sonata and the *Années de pèlerinage*. Thanks to Howard's years of study, much of it in conjunction with the late Michael Short, we will also soon have the first comprehensive thematic catalogue of Liszt's works, the first two volumes of which are due to appear this year. Looking back at the 'Dante' Sonata, Howard tells me about the complex history of the manuscript and the 'frankly shoddy' work of previous editors; his own brand of scholarship is a unique blend of academic rigour guided by a performer's nous.

Howard has been President of the Liszt Society since 1987, when he took over from Louis Kentner, another great Liszt pianist. Kentner and Howard had been firm friends for a decade previously, having bumped into each other clutching the same edition of *Christus* after a performance at Westminster Cathedral.

An upcoming Wigmore Hall birthday recital celebrates Howard's long association both with Liszt and with this august venue (where he first played half a century ago). There is real history here: Ted Perry of Hyperion heard him in a recital that included Beethoven's 'Hammerklavier' Sonata and all of Liszt's waltzes – Perry told Howard 'that second half is a record' and the rest is history. Howard has been in conversation about another Liszt recording: there are some things in his birthday recital that are neither in the box-set nor in the four volumes of 'New Discoveries' that were issued subsequently, including *Der Todes Engel*, S190*a* (1871). The recital concludes with the *Hungarian Rhapsodies* Nos 16-19.

I do wonder if Howard would like to be remembered for anything other than Liszt: Anton Rubinstein, perhaps? 'I've played a lot of Rubinstein,' he says, 'and I've played a lot of Rachmaninov. I've made a thing of the latter's sonatas, especially the original version of No 2.' (His recording of these sonatas for Melba was issued in 2011, and his performance of the Second Sonata was hailed by *Gramophone* for its 'virile energy', described as being 'in complete control of the pianistic demands and of the architectural span'.) He was also involved in the Boosey edition of Rachmaninov's Fourth Concerto, along with Robert Threlfall. Howard's championing of lesser-known and under-appreciated composers has been a thread throughout his career, including a love of the music of Percy Grainger, who was undervalued even in Australia when Howard was growing up.

Finally, Howard is also a composer, something he tells me gives him valuable insight into other composers' processes. He says he composes 'when I have time to do it, which is less and less these days; it's been part and parcel of the way I look at everything. When you look at something with a composer's head on, you can see which way pieces could have gone.' This thought leads to some final words of wisdom: 'If you want to put together a proper performance of something, you have to understand absolutely everything you can about the structure of the piece.' **IP**

Classical MUSIC

# Insight and inspiration for music professionals

Spring 2022
www.classical-music.uk
Classical MUSIC
Insight and inspiration for professionals
Classic FM at 30
Alexander Armstrong and Anne-Marie Minhall on three decades of making classical music more accessible
Brundibár at 80
The Purcell School on staging Hans Krása's overlooked masterpiece in its anniversary year
Are you covered?
The first in our series of self-employed musician guides shines a spotlight on insurance
Made in Chelsea
Cadogan Hall managing director Adam McGinlay shares the London venue's latest triumphs
PLUS: Funding advice ■ Touring Malta ■ Festivals ■ Competitions guide
NOW BACK IN PRINT
Read more
Read more
Read more

BARBARA HANNIGAN BECOMES FIRST EVER LSO ASSOCIATE ARTIST

Florence Lockheart

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2022

The Canadian soprano and conductor will hold the rolefor three years, influencing LSO's programme and working internationally with the orchestra.

© Marco Borggreve

The **London Symphony Orchestra** (LSO) has announced the appointment of Canadian soprano and conductor **Barbara Hannigan** to the newly created role of associate artist.

The LSO describes associate artists as 'musicians with distinct influences, quality and style that

Classical MUSIC Insight and inspiration for professionals

**Rebeca Omordia on this year's African Concert Series**

Susan Nickalls talks to Rebeca Omordia about this year's African Concert Series and the journey of musical discovery which led her there.

**University of Liverpool launches Tung Auditorium**

The venue opened last week for free lunchtime concerts, with evening shows beginning next month.

**Jordi Savall receives RPS Honorary Membership**

The Royal Philharmonic Society membership is given in recognition Savall's outstanding services to music.

*Classical Music* offers insight and inspiration for all industry professionals and lovers of classical music. Our daily subscriber newsletter brings breaking news and developments direct to your inbox each weekday morning, while our quarterly magazine and website are packed with in-depth features and opinion – from interviews with leading musicians and senior arts figures; coverage of festivals, competitions, courses and concerts; to expert guidance on funding, touring, venues and more.

## Subscribe today

magsubscriptions.com/classical-music ☎ +44 (0)1722 716997 subscriptions@markallengroup.com

MARCO BORGGREVE

# Russian master

**Kirill Gerstein** marks the 150th anniversary of Rachmaninov's birth by recording piano works spanning the composer's output between 1892 and 1931

*Learning from Rachmaninov: Kirill Gerstein revels in the composer's pianism as well as his music*

Rachmaninov was that rare combination of a great composer and great performer. He was also one of the first important composers of the 20th century who, alongside Bartók and Stravinsky, left a record of their thoughts not only on paper but also in sound. Rachmaninov was acutely aware of the importance of his recorded legacy.

The Second Concerto is very fragile. It depends on a joint feeling created in the moment to successfully navigate the rubato at every corner. This means the process of recreating it is much more intangible and ethereal. By contrast, in the Third Concerto, if the soloist, conductor and orchestra all have a strong idea of their roles and everybody plays their part, the piece will come out reasonably well.

In the case of the Second Piano Concerto, Rachmaninov made two recordings, and they present today's performers with an interesting interpretative dilemma. What should we make of the discrepancies between how the piece is notated and how it is played? Should we follow the score or the recordings? In this concerto particularly, there is a lot of performance 'sediment'. Generally, I believe the score is our salvation and looking closely at the composer's notated thoughts allows us to scrub away the layers of performing habits that have crept in over the decades.

For example, in his recording Rachmaninov quickens the tempo into the first transition, which is not marked as an *accelerando* in the score but works well, so this is something Kirill Petrenko – who conducts my new recording of the work –and I have adopted. He also brings a strong shape to the second theme of the first movement, introducing a *ritardando* followed by an *a tempo* that are not notated. These are just small examples of the kinds of things Rachmaninov can teach us through his recordings.

As I tell my students, all great pianists who recorded in the Golden Age are great teachers but none more than Rachmaninov, who seems to get better and better each time I hear him. He had a kind of rubato that's unlike anyone else's and his sense of timing is fascinating. Naturally, nobody wants a facsimile of a Rachmaninov performance but it's important to be inspired by his playing. Refusing to study interpretations by other great musicians is like saying 'I want to be a writer but won't read Shakespeare'. It is wrong to worry about damaging one's individuality, which (if one has it) will survive and be enriched. Eventually we are all our own people and cannot and should not copy others. Besides, every performance becomes one's own interpretation, whether one wants it or not! As a pianist, even the physics of one's body – such as the ratio between your elbow and your forearm – makes the precise sound and timing vary between individuals.

Rehearsing the Second Concerto with Maestro Petrenko and the Berlin Philharmonic was a very intense experience. We began by meeting to discuss the transitions and try out various possibilities. He had already pre-rehearsed the orchestra, which is unusual for such a well-known piece. Yet even after our final general rehearsal together, he kept on working further with me and the orchestra.

This recording is fuelled by the adrenalin of the live performance, which took place in front of thousands of people at Berlin's Waldbühne in Olympiapark on a wonderful summer night last June. It felt like it had really come together, so we decided it should be released to mark Rachmaninov's anniversary year in 2023.

Working with Maestro Petrenko felt like a harmonious and affirmative process. We each wanted to accomplish the same things and achieve an organic reading of the concerto, underpinned by our shared love of the piece. While it may sound fanciful, I was struck by the special soft power that emanates from him. His extreme care and attention translate into love for the musical substance, which, I think, is palpable in this recording.

The way a conductor influences people around him or her is not just through words and gestures, but by *being*. Maestro Petrenko draws people in, which was certainly my experience of working with him and the Berlin Philharmonic. He also genuinely listens, and is concerned as much with taking things in as with putting things out. The result is a magical dance between the conductor, orchestra and soloist. The sheer exuberance and excitement that result in a piece such as Rachmaninov's Second Concerto are like sitting on a volcano!

We all absorb facts, stories and myths about our favourite people. Rachmaninov frequently spoke about his depression and recovery though hypnosis while writing the Second Concerto so there is doubtless truth in it. But I also think such accounts from artists tend to settle, congeal and canonise themselves over time. Even the person who is the original source gets into the habit of telling the story.

Rachmaninov has a number of canonised stories associated with him. As a performer and a modern man he understood the importance of creating a narrative, particularly in America at that time, but in the long run these risk constraining the richness of life. Surely the genesis of the Second Concerto must have been more complex than just his recovery through hypnosis?

The same is true of the story of the 'tragic émigré' who felt nostalgia for his country, to which he could not return and which had virtually ceased to exist. This may have been partly true, so I am not saying Rachmaninov was not being genuine, but there was also a public craving for the consumption of nostalgia after the First World War. Pining for the 'good old days' is quite a 20th-century phenomenon, so for Rachmaninov, who was glamorous and a bit alien in America, it suited him to be painted as a shard of the Old World that had been lost. He didn't mind playing to this image.

Unfortunately, as a result, some people in the musical and critical fraternity came to regard him as an anachronistic composer who was not a modernist but belonged in the 19th century with his beloved Tchaikovsky. They believed Rachmaninov's music would quickly become passé, yet here we are celebrating the 150th anniversary of his birth.

*'Rachmaninov was a very modern and thus relatable figure'*

Rachmaninov's music has clearly not gone away despite attempts to dismiss it as old-fashioned Romanticism or pianistic fluff. Neither view has dented audiences' love for his music nor its popularity. So now is as good a time as any to revisit the pieces for what they are, namely truly excellent compositions.

Rather than 'the modernist who didn't come to be', we can now see that Rachmaninov was a very modern and thus relatable figure. His music grapples with the 20th-century transformation of the world between old and new, as well as dealing with the ever-increasing pace of change. He did this with great individuality and sincerity, reflecting societal changes through his longing for things that had been lost while embracing new technology, even if not always happily. Ultimately, he was neither a modernist nor an anachronist but in a psychological and aesthetic sense a very modern personality.

This is the backdrop against which we should understand the sadness and darkness at the heart of Rachmaninov's 'Corelli' Variations. It is a personal outcry that is the private sibling of the 'Paganini' Rhapsody, which was his next, highly public opus. You might say it is the 'home' version of the Rhapsody.

Other biographical elements are also manifest in the 'Corelli' Variations, notably Rachmaninov's low self-esteem, of which he often spoke. In particular, there is a

*Kirill Gerstein performs Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No 2 at Berlin's Waldbühne*

tragic quote from the end of his life which I find crushing. Paraphrasing a Russian proverb, he said: 'I have chased three rabbits at the same time – conducting, playing the piano and composing – and have failed at all three.'

The insecurity he had felt since his early days was compounded by his move to America and the negative critical response his music received there. We know he composed relatively few works after the Russian Revolution, so when he unveiled the 'Corelli' Variations he was full of doubts. He famously wrote to Medtner that he was so uncertain about whether he had written a good piece that every time an audience member coughed he would skip the next variation. Somewhere in Canada, I think maybe Toronto, he ended up playing only 10 variations out of 20.

Yet despite coming from a man who knows he is ageing, who is tired and heartbroken, the 'Corelli' Variations is not a monochromatically downcast piece. There is a lot of virility and exuberance in it too. Several variations reference Schumann and Grieg, while some of its harmonies are responding to the sound of jazz. Fragmentations and disfigurations of the theme even recall Stravinsky, all while staying true to Rachmaninov's personal idiom.

The bulk of the piece is in D minor but the central variations are cast in D flat major – pointing towards the forthcoming lyricism of the famous Variation 18 in the 'Paganini' Rhapsody. Generally, D flat major is one of the most Romantic keys for Rachmaninov, such as in the second movement of the Third Concerto, where the glow of love is similarly strong.

Every time I get to the coda of the 'Corelli' Variations, I feel it is a piece written by an older person who has experienced both disappointments and the richness of being. Its spirit is very different from the kind of music written by someone in their 20s.

Alongside the 'Corelli' Variations, my new solo album features three miniatures that highlight different aspects of Rachmaninov's output. This album is intended to be like a small window through which we can cast a glance on Rachmaninov's early, middle and late styles.

While the Second Concerto comes from Rachmaninov's ripe middle period, the Mélodie in E major, Op 3 No 3, is an early work he carried throughout his life. The complete Op 3 collection comprising five solo pieces was originally published with the help of Tchaikovsky, who was Rachmaninov's great mentor. Very late in life, Rachmaninov returned to this charming piece he had written as a 17-year-old and transcribed it in a luscious Godowsky-like style. With due respect, I've always found this too lavish for such innocent material, so I prefer to play the early version.

Next comes a homage to Rachmaninov the pianist and transcriber, and to his friendship with the great violinist and composer Fritz Kreisler. It is likely through Kreisler that Rachmaninov learnt the theme of the 'Corelli' Variations, having heard Kreisler play the Corelli sonata that includes this 'La Follia' theme. The Variations are dedicated to Kreisler and are offered here as a counterweight to the concerto, representing Rachmaninov's late style.

Finally, I have included my own transcription of a song from Rachmaninov's Op 4 *Romances*: 'In the Secret of the Night'. This is an early work I have always loved but was unable to perform, not being a singer. There are already some other solo piano transcriptions of this piece, cast in a post-Godowsky style with six layers of inner voices that for me overwhelm the character of the original. Much as I admire the pianism and creativity of Earl Wild's version, for example, I find it too opulent.

If Wild's transcription recalls Rachmaninov of the 1930s and early 1940s, I wanted to evoke his earlier style of the period *c*1905-1912. It was an interesting process, for it is one thing to be a reader of this style as opposed to gaining a more specific practical understanding of what is involved in reproducing its textures. I found it very illuminating and enjoyable to create my own little homage to the great tradition of pianist-composers who excelled in transcriptions and arrangements.

I played two different Steinways for these albums. The one used for the solo works was gloriously prepared by Thomas Hübsch, who is the principal piano technician (magician) of the Berlin Philharmonie. I was also blessed with the wonderful conditions of the Grosser Saal of the Philharmonie as my recording studio. The empty hall sounds absolutely wonderful for the solo piano – it is a beautiful venue that offers plenty of space to breathe, which works very well for Rachmaninov's voluminous piano textures. **IP**

**INTERVIEW BY OWEN MORTIMER**

*Kirill Gerstein's new Rachmaninov recordings will soon be available on Platoon, including an immersive spatial audio mix in Dolby Atmos. Gerstein's solo piano transcription of 'In the Secret of the Night', Op 4 No 3, is published by Faber Music. kirillgerstein.com*

# music&drama education awards 2023

## CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE WINNERS OF THIS YEAR'S MUSIC & DRAMA EDUCATION AWARDS

**Outstanding Musical Initiative**
Opera North, for Opera North Big Sing: The Water Diviner's Tale

Highly commended: Surrey Music Hub, for Music Connects

**Outstanding Music Education Resource**
Out of the Ark Music, for Sparkyard

**Excellence in SEND (Music & Drama)**
West Midlands Inclusive Choir

**Excellence in Musical Theatre**
Garsington Opera, for 'Dalia'

**Excellence in Primary/Early years (Music & Drama)**
Nate Holder, Helen MacGregor, and Collins Music, for 'Listen and Celebrate'

Highly commended: Live Music Now, for Lullaby Project

**Outstanding School Music Department**
Nelson Primary School, Newham

Highly commended: The Bourne Academy, Bournemouth

**Francesca Hanley Inspiration Award**
Rebecca Beavis

Highly commended: Gillian Mott

**Instrumental/Vocal Teacher of the Year**
Daniel Johnston

**The Rocksteady Award for Progressive and Inclusive Music Education**
Music for Good, for 'Music Prescribed for Wellbeing in a GP surgery' project

**Drama Inspiration Award**
Nina Lemon

Highly commended: Tommy Robinson

**Outstanding Drama Education Resource**
We Teach Drama, for 'Think Like a Lighting Designer'

**Outstanding Drama Initiative**
London Bubble Theatre, for 'Playing Safe'

**Outstanding School Drama Department**
St Mary's College, Hull

**Lifetime Achievement Award**
Norton York

**Lifetime Achievement Memorial Prize**
John Thomson

**Music Teacher Magazine Editor's Award**
Stephen O'Regan, for the Ukraine Music Hub

**Drama & Theatre Magazine Editor's Award**
Vamos Theatre

Headline sponsor

CASIO. CLASSIC fM

Thank you to our sponsors

AVID ISM INDEPENDENT SOCIETY OF MUSICIANS Musicians' Union mu MUSIC TEACHERS ASSOCIATION RATstands ROCK STEADY ACTIVE LEARNING

# A century of Gramophone

April 1923 saw the launch by Sir Compton Mackenzie of a new magazine dedicated to the rapidly growing world of classical recordings. We celebrate this milestone by reprinting a handful of classic features on pianists from Gramophone's pages

This month sees the centenary of our sister publication *Gramophone*, whose first issue – then called *The Gramophone* and containing 24 pages – was issued in April 1923, two years before the advent of electrical recording, when recording techniques were in their infancy. The current issue of *Gramophone* is a bumper edition with 180 pages, including a detailed history of classical recording through the eyes of the magazine by Editor-in-Chief (and past Editor) James Jolly, and also including an archive section presenting a snapshot of 100 years of writing about great artists in *Gramophone*'s pages. Here we join in these centenary celebrations with a small selection of piano-based pieces dating from 1934 to 1991.

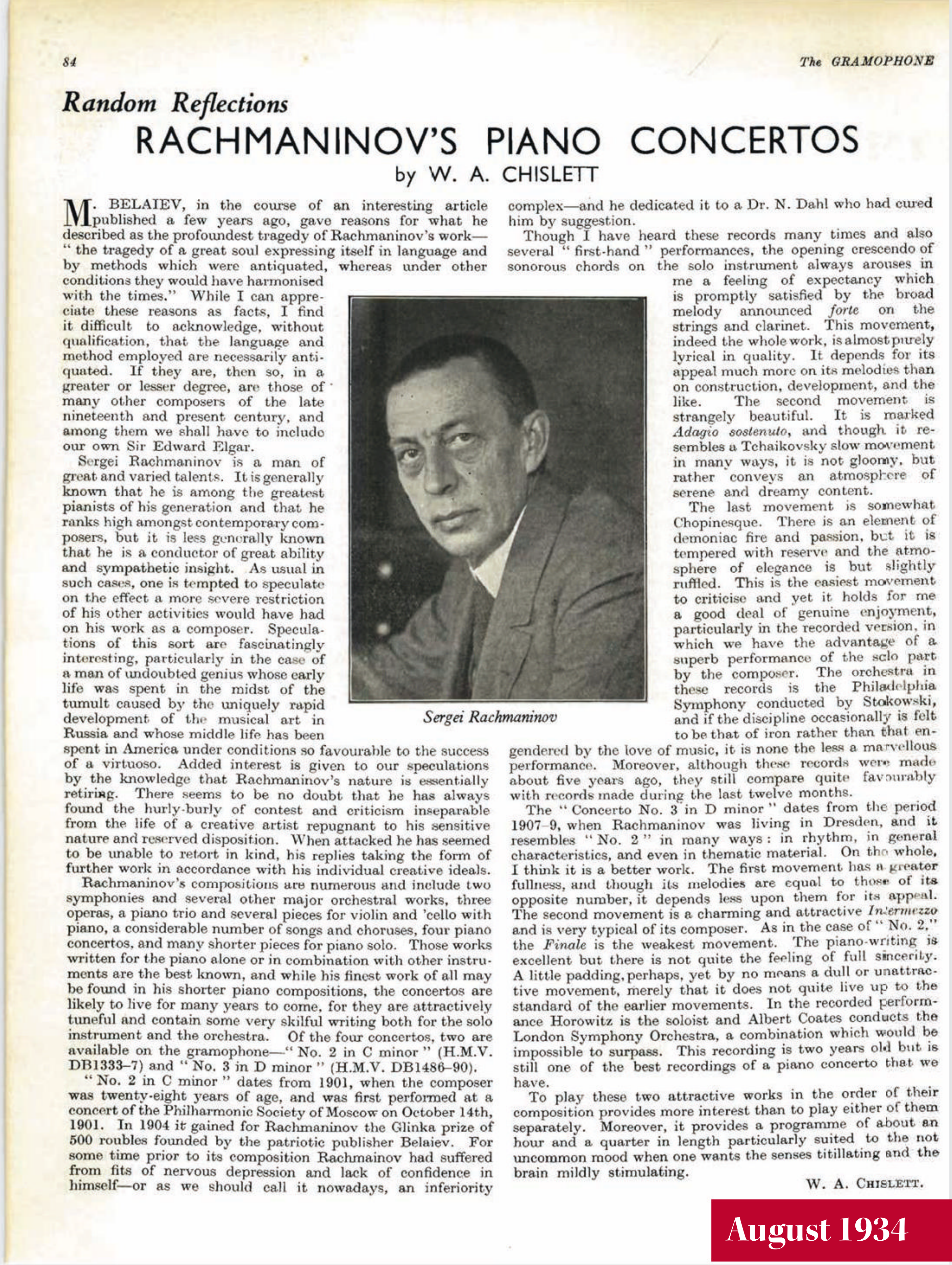
The first article contains 'random reflections', as it modestly styles itself, on Rachmaninov's piano concertos by William Chislett, who contributed to *Gramophone* for more than half of its life, writing his first piece in the February 1925 issue and still going strong over 50 years later. This piece, from August 1934, reminds us that the first recordings of the First and Fourth Concertos were not made until the composer set them down in, respectively, 1940 and 1941. (The first recordings of these concertos by pianists other than Rachmaninov were by Moiseiwitsch, No 1 in 1948, and Yakov Zak, No 4 in 1951.) Chislett's view that the Second and Third Concertos benefit from being performed together in sequence rather than heard separately did not stand the test of time – although it became a common coupling on record – but his praise for Horowitz's 1930 recording of No 3 with Albert Coates as 'one of the best recordings of a piano concerto that we have' is easy to understand.

For many years Alan Blyth was one of *Gramophone*'s most engaging writers. He ultimately specialised in the voice but in earlier years he conducted regular interviews with leading artists including many pianists. Here we reprint two memorable encounters from the early 1970s, one with Charles Rosen, the other with Alicia de Larrocha. Rosen's pioneering book *The Classical Style* was published in 1971, and his fierce intelligence shines through every sentence. We are reminded, too, of Alicia de Larrocha's tiny stature (4'9") and small hands, and can only marvel afresh at her supreme navigation of, among other things, Albéniz's *Iberia* and Rachmaninov's Third Concerto.

For the May 1987 issue, Edward Seckerson – still, more than 35 years later, a core part of *Gramophone*'s team of writers – spoke to Murray Perahia, 'one of music's natural poets'. It's a warm and revealing interview, the kind from which in more recent years Perahia has retreated, and offers a refreshing view of a young pianist relishing a musical journey of discovery. The intriguing coupling of Schubert's Sonata D959 with the Berg Sonata never came to pass – although Perahia recorded both works in 1987, the Schubert appeared the following year with Schumann's G minor Sonata, while the Berg lay unissued for a decade before being included in Perahia's 25th Anniversary Edition. The same fate befell Perahia's 1986 recording of Tippett's First Sonata, for whatever reason. Certainly Perahia's image as an artist most comfortable in the music of Classical and early Romantic composers was one he seemed keen to confront.

Finally, from August 1991, Robert Layton reflects on the careers of three great pianists who died within little more than a month of each other: Claudio Arrau, Wilhelm Kempff and Rudolf Serkin. The piano world had already mourned the deaths of a succession of great pianists, including John Ogdon and Vladimir Horowitz in 1989 and Jorge Bolet in 1990, but Arrau, Kempff and Serkin embodied a particular kind of pianism – truly the end of an era.

*Compton Mackenzie in 1936*



## *Random Reflections*

# RACHMANINOV'S PIANO CONCERTOS

### by W. A. CHISLETT

M. BELAIEV, in the course of an interesting article published a few years ago, gave reasons for what he described as the profoundest tragedy of Rachmaninov's work—" the tragedy of a great soul expressing itself in language and by methods which were antiquated, whereas under other conditions they would have harmonised with the times." While I can appreciate these reasons as facts, I find it difficult to acknowledge, without qualification, that the language and method employed are necessarily antiquated. If they are, then so, in a greater or lesser degree, are those of many other composers of the late nineteenth and present century, and among them we shall have to include our own Sir Edward Elgar.

Sergei Rachmaninov is a man of great and varied talents. It is generally known that he is among the greatest pianists of his generation and that he ranks high amongst contemporary composers, but it is less generally known that he is a conductor of great ability and sympathetic insight. As usual in such cases, one is tempted to speculate on the effect a more severe restriction of his other activities would have had on his work as a composer. Speculations of this sort are fascinatingly interesting, particularly in the case of a man of undoubted genius whose early life was spent in the midst of the tumult caused by the uniquely rapid development of the musical art in Russia and whose middle life has been spent in America under conditions so favourable to the success of a virtuoso. Added interest is given to our speculations by the knowledge that Rachmaninov's nature is essentially retiring. There seems to be no doubt that he has always found the hurly-burly of contest and criticism inseparable from the life of a creative artist repugnant to his sensitive nature and reserved disposition. When attacked he has seemed to be unable to retort in kind, his replies taking the form of further work in accordance with his individual creative ideals.

*Sergei Rachmaninov*

Rachmaninov's compositions are numerous and include two symphonies and several other major orchestral works, three operas, a piano trio and several pieces for violin and 'cello with piano, a considerable number of songs and choruses, four piano concertos, and many shorter pieces for piano solo. Those works written for the piano alone or in combination with other instruments are the best known, and while his finest work of all may be found in his shorter piano compositions, the concertos are likely to live for many years to come, for they are attractively tuneful and contain some very skilful writing both for the solo instrument and the orchestra. Of the four concertos, two are available on the gramophone—" No. 2 in C minor " (H.M.V. DB1333–7) and " No. 3 in D minor " (H.M.V. DB1486–90).

" No. 2 in C minor " dates from 1901, when the composer was twenty-eight years of age, and was first performed at a concert of the Philharmonic Society of Moscow on October 14th, 1901. In 1904 it gained for Rachmaninov the Glinka prize of 500 roubles founded by the patriotic publisher Belaiev. For some time prior to its composition Rachmainov had suffered from fits of nervous depression and lack of confidence in himself—or as we should call it nowadays, an inferiority complex—and he dedicated it to a Dr. N. Dahl who had cured him by suggestion.

Though I have heard these records many times and also several " first-hand " performances, the opening crescendo of sonorous chords on the solo instrument always arouses in me a feeling of expectancy which is promptly satisfied by the broad melody announced *forte* on the strings and clarinet. This movement, indeed the whole work, is almost purely lyrical in quality. It depends for its appeal much more on its melodies than on construction, development, and the like. The second movement is strangely beautiful. It is marked *Adagio sostenuto*, and though it resembles a Tchaikovsky slow movement in many ways, it is not gloomy, but rather conveys an atmosphere of serene and dreamy content.

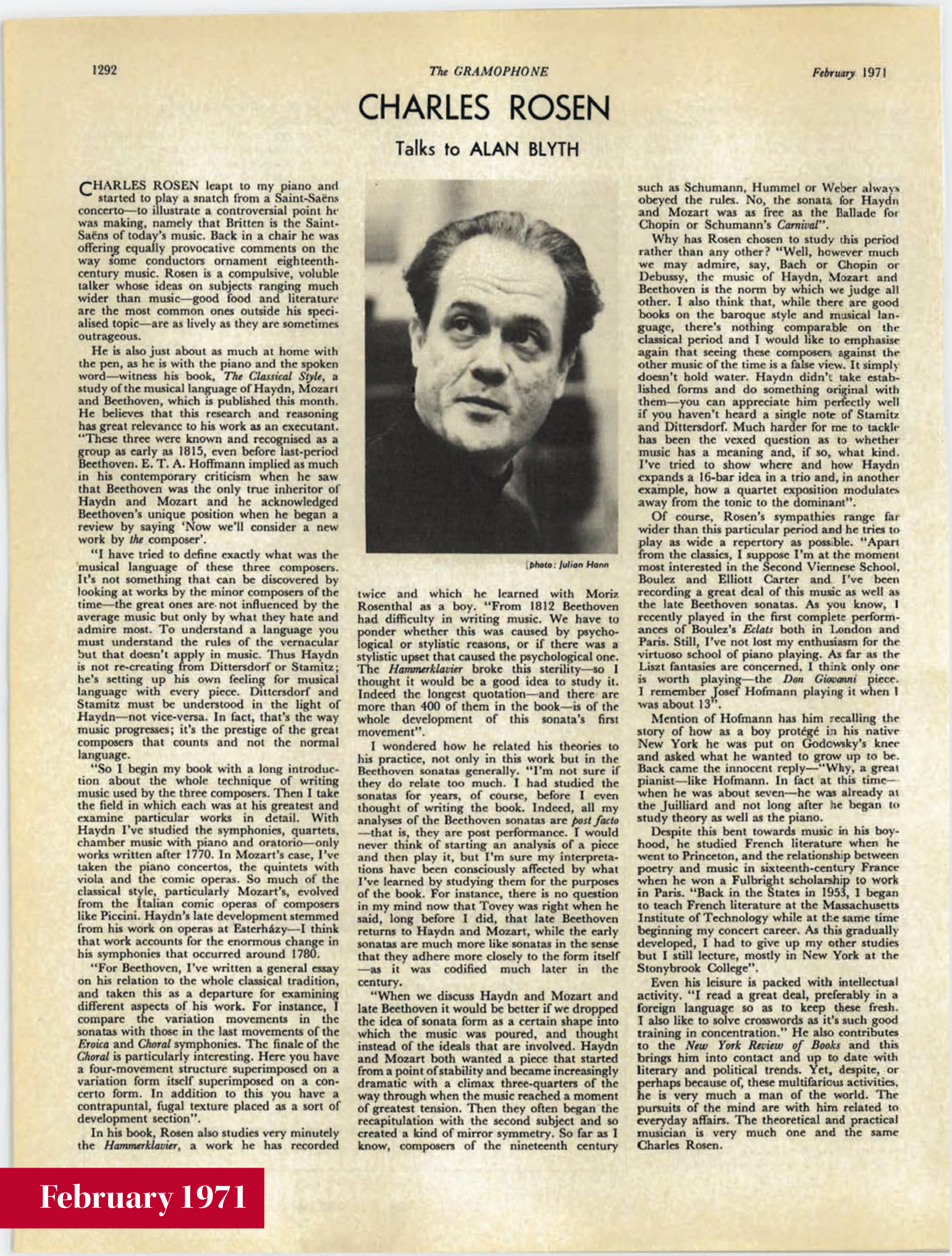
The last movement is somewhat Chopinesque. There is an element of demoniac fire and passion, but it is tempered with reserve and the atmosphere of elegance is but slightly ruffled. This is the easiest movement to criticise and yet it holds for me a good deal of genuine enjoyment, particularly in the recorded version, in which we have the advantage of a superb performance of the solo part by the composer. The orchestra in these records is the Philadelphia Symphony conducted by Stokowski, and if the discipline occasionally is felt to be that of iron rather than that engendered by the love of music, it is none the less a marvellous performance. Moreover, although these records were made about five years ago, they still compare quite favourably with records made during the last twelve months.

The " Concerto No. 3 in D minor " dates from the period 1907–9, when Rachmaninov was living in Dresden, and it resembles " No. 2 " in many ways: in rhythm, in general characteristics, and even in thematic material. On the whole, I think it is a better work. The first movement has a greater fullness, and though its melodies are equal to those of its opposite number, it depends less upon them for its appeal. The second movement is a charming and attractive *Intermezzo* and is very typical of its composer. As in the case of " No. 2," the *Finale* is the weakest movement. The piano-writing is excellent but there is not quite the feeling of full sincerity. A little padding, perhaps, yet by no means a dull or unattractive movement, merely that it does not quite live up to the standard of the earlier movements. In the recorded performance Horowitz is the soloist and Albert Coates conducts the London Symphony Orchestra, a combination which would be impossible to surpass. This recording is two years old but is still one of the best recordings of a piano concerto that we have.

To play these two attractive works in the order of their composition provides more interest than to play either of them separately. Moreover, it provides a programme of about an hour and a quarter in length particularly suited to the not uncommon mood when one wants the senses titillating and the brain mildly stimulating.

W. A. CHISLETT.

August 1934



# CHARLES ROSEN

## Talks to ALAN BLYTH

CHARLES ROSEN leapt to my piano and started to play a snatch from a Saint-Saëns concerto—to illustrate a controversial point he was making, namely that Britten is the Saint-Saëns of today's music. Back in a chair he was offering equally provocative comments on the way some conductors ornament eighteenth-century music. Rosen is a compulsive, voluble talker whose ideas on subjects ranging much wider than music—good food and literature are the most common ones outside his specialised topic—are as lively as they are sometimes outrageous.

He is also just about as much at home with the pen, as he is with the piano and the spoken word—witness his book, *The Classical Style*, a study of the musical language of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, which is published this month. He believes that this research and reasoning has great relevance to his work as an executant. "These three were known and recognised as a group as early as 1815, even before last-period Beethoven. E. T. A. Hoffmann implied as much in his contemporary criticism when he saw that Beethoven was the only true inheritor of Haydn and Mozart and he acknowledged Beethoven's unique position when he began a review by saying 'Now we'll consider a new work by *the* composer'.

"I have tried to define exactly what was the musical language of these three composers. It's not something that can be discovered by looking at works by the minor composers of the time—the great ones are not influenced by the average music but only by what they hate and admire most. To understand a language you must understand the rules of the vernacular but that doesn't apply in music. Thus Haydn is not re-creating from Dittersdorf or Stamitz; he's setting up his own feeling for musical language with every piece. Dittersdorf and Stamitz must be understood in the light of Haydn—not vice-versa. In fact, that's the way music progresses; it's the prestige of the great composers that counts and not the normal language.

"So I begin my book with a long introduction about the whole technique of writing music used by the three composers. Then I take the field in which each was at his greatest and examine particular works in detail. With Haydn I've studied the symphonies, quartets, chamber music with piano and oratorio—only works written after 1770. In Mozart's case, I've taken the piano concertos, the quintets with viola and the comic operas. So much of the classical style, particularly Mozart's, evolved from the Italian comic operas of composers like Piccini. Haydn's late development stemmed from his work on operas at Esterházy—I think that work accounts for the enormous change in his symphonies that occurred around 1780.

"For Beethoven, I've written a general essay on his relation to the whole classical tradition, and taken this as a departure for examining different aspects of his work. For instance, I compare the variation movements in the sonatas with those in the last movements of the *Eroica* and *Choral* symphonies. The finale of the *Choral* is particularly interesting. Here you have a four-movement structure superimposed on a variation form itself superimposed on a concerto form. In addition to this you have a contrapuntal, fugal texture placed as a sort of development section".

In his book, Rosen also studies very minutely the *Hammerklavier*, a work he has recorded twice and which he learned with Moriz Rosenthal as a boy. "From 1812 Beethoven had difficulty in writing music. We have to ponder whether this was caused by psychological or stylistic reasons, or if there was a stylistic upset that caused the psychological one. The *Hammerklavier* broke this sterility—so I thought it would be a good idea to study it. Indeed the longest quotation—and there are more than 400 of them in the book—is of the whole development of this sonata's first movement".

[photo: Julian Hann

I wondered how he related his theories to his practice, not only in this work but in the Beethoven sonatas generally. "I'm not sure if they do relate too much. I had studied the sonatas for years, of course, before I even thought of writing the book. Indeed, all my analyses of the Beethoven sonatas are *post facto*—that is, they are post performance. I would never think of starting an analysis of a piece and then play it, but I'm sure my interpretations have been consciously affected by what I've learned by studying them for the purposes of the book. For instance, there is no question in my mind now that Tovey was right when he said, long before I did, that late Beethoven returns to Haydn and Mozart, while the early sonatas are much more like sonatas in the sense that they adhere more closely to the form itself—as it was codified much later in the century.

"When we discuss Haydn and Mozart and late Beethoven it would be better if we dropped the idea of sonata form as a certain shape into which the music was poured, and thought instead of the ideals that are involved. Haydn and Mozart both wanted a piece that started from a point of stability and became increasingly dramatic with a climax three-quarters of the way through when the music reached a moment of greatest tension. Then they often began the recapitulation with the second subject and so created a kind of mirror symmetry. So far as I know, composers of the nineteenth century such as Schumann, Hummel or Weber always obeyed the rules. No, the sonata for Haydn and Mozart was as free as the Ballade for Chopin or Schumann's *Carnival*".

Why has Rosen chosen to study this period rather than any other? "Well, however much we may admire, say, Bach or Chopin or Debussy, the music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven is the norm by which we judge all other. I also think that, while there are good books on the baroque style and musical language, there's nothing comparable on the classical period and I would like to emphasise again that seeing these composers against the other music of the time is a false view. It simply doesn't hold water. Haydn didn't take established forms and do something original with them—you can appreciate him perfectly well if you haven't heard a single note of Stamitz and Dittersdorf. Much harder for me to tackle has been the vexed question as to whether music has a meaning and, if so, what kind. I've tried to show where and how Haydn expands a 16-bar idea in a trio and, in another example, how a quartet exposition modulates away from the tonic to the dominant".

Of course, Rosen's sympathies range far wider than this particular period and he tries to play as wide a repertory as possible. "Apart from the classics, I suppose I'm at the moment most interested in the Second Viennese School, Boulez and Elliott Carter and I've been recording a great deal of this music as well as the late Beethoven sonatas. As you know, I recently played in the first complete performances of Boulez's *Eclats* both in London and Paris. Still, I've not lost my enthusiasm for the virtuoso school of piano playing. As far as the Liszt fantasies are concerned, I think only one is worth playing—the *Don Giovanni* piece. I remember Josef Hofmann playing it when I was about 13".

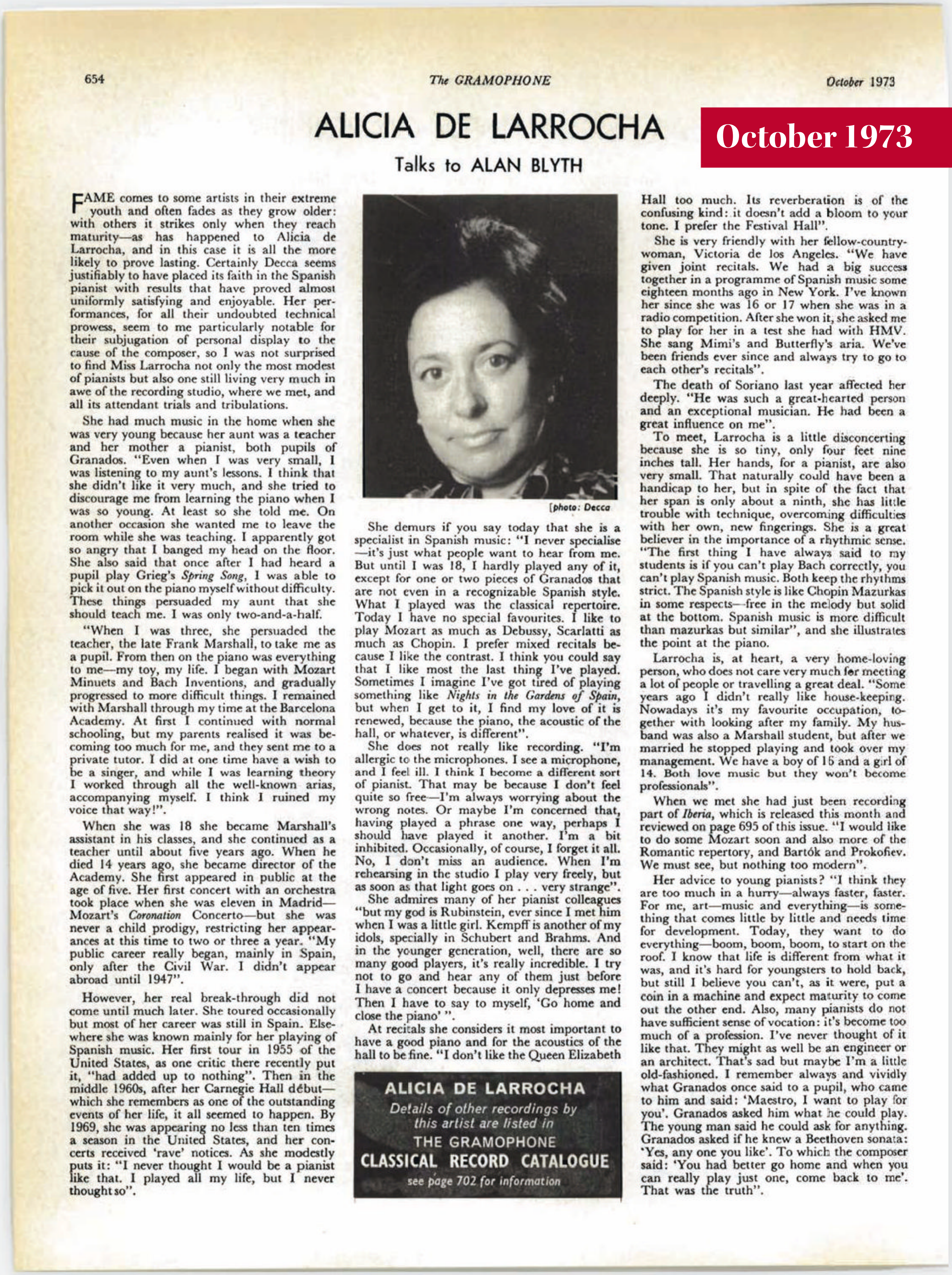
Mention of Hofmann has him recalling the story of how as a boy protégé in his native New York he was put on Godowsky's knee and asked what he wanted to grow up to be. Back came the innocent reply—"Why, a great pianist—like Hofmann. In fact at this time—when he was about seven—he was already at the Juilliard and not long after he began to study theory as well as the piano.

Despite this bent towards music in his boyhood, he studied French literature when he went to Princeton, and the relationship between poetry and music in sixteenth-century France when he won a Fulbright scholarship to work in Paris. "Back in the States in 1953, I began to teach French literature at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology while at the same time beginning my concert career. As this gradually developed, I had to give up my other studies but I still lecture, mostly in New York at the Stonybrook College".

Even his leisure is packed with intellectual activity. "I read a great deal, preferably in a foreign language so as to keep these fresh. I also like to solve crosswords as it's such good training in concentration." He also contributes to the *New York Review of Books* and this brings him into contact and up to date with literary and political trends. Yet, despite, or perhaps because of, these multifarious activities, he is very much a man of the world. The pursuits of the mind are with him related to everyday affairs. The theoretical and practical musician is very much one and the same Charles Rosen.

**February 1971**

**October 1973**



654 *The GRAMOPHONE* October 1973

# ALICIA DE LARROCHA

## Talks to ALAN BLYTH

FAME comes to some artists in their extreme youth and often fades as they grow older: with others it strikes only when they reach maturity—as has happened to Alicia de Larrocha, and in this case it is all the more likely to prove lasting. Certainly Decca seems justifiably to have placed its faith in the Spanish pianist with results that have proved almost uniformly satisfying and enjoyable. Her performances, for all their undoubted technical prowess, seem to me particularly notable for their subjugation of personal display to the cause of the composer, so I was not surprised to find Miss Larrocha not only the most modest of pianists but also one still living very much in awe of the recording studio, where we met, and all its attendant trials and tribulations.

She had much music in the home when she was very young because her aunt was a teacher and her mother a pianist, both pupils of Granados. "Even when I was very small, I was listening to my aunt's lessons. I think that she didn't like it very much, and she tried to discourage me from learning the piano when I was so young. At least so she told me. On another occasion she wanted me to leave the room while she was teaching. I apparently got so angry that I banged my head on the floor. She also said that once after I had heard a pupil play Grieg's *Spring Song*, I was able to pick it out on the piano myself without difficulty. These things persuaded my aunt that she should teach me. I was only two-and-a-half.

"When I was three, she persuaded the teacher, the late Frank Marshall, to take me as a pupil. From then on the piano was everything to me—my toy, my life. I began with Mozart Minuets and Bach Inventions, and gradually progressed to more difficult things. I remained with Marshall through my time at the Barcelona Academy. At first I continued with normal schooling, but my parents realised it was becoming too much for me, and they sent me to a private tutor. I did at one time have a wish to be a singer, and while I was learning theory I worked through all the well-known arias, accompanying myself. I think I ruined my voice that way!".

When she was 18 she became Marshall's assistant in his classes, and she continued as a teacher until about five years ago. When he died 14 years ago, she became director of the Academy. She first appeared in public at the age of five. Her first concert with an orchestra took place when she was eleven in Madrid—Mozart's *Coronation* Concerto—but she was never a child prodigy, restricting her appearances at this time to two or three a year. "My public career really began, mainly in Spain, only after the Civil War. I didn't appear abroad until 1947".

However, her real break-through did not come until much later. She toured occasionally but most of her career was still in Spain. Elsewhere she was known mainly for her playing of Spanish music. Her first tour in 1955 of the United States, as one critic there recently put it, "had added up to nothing". Then in the middle 1960s, after her Carnegie Hall début—which she remembers as one of the outstanding events of her life, it all seemed to happen. By 1969, she was appearing no less than ten times a season in the United States, and her concerts received 'rave' notices. As she modestly puts it: "I never thought I would be a pianist like that. I played all my life, but I never thought so".

[photo: Decca

She demurs if you say today that she is a specialist in Spanish music: "I never specialise—it's just what people want to hear from me. But until I was 18, I hardly played any of it, except for one or two pieces of Granados that are not even in a recognizable Spanish style. What I played was the classical repertoire. Today I have no special favourites. I like to play Mozart as much as Debussy, Scarlatti as much as Chopin. I prefer mixed recitals because I like the contrast. I think you could say that I like most the last thing I've played. Sometimes I imagine I've got tired of playing something like *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, but when I get to it, I find my love of it is renewed, because the piano, the acoustic of the hall, or whatever, is different".

She does not really like recording. "I'm allergic to the microphones. I see a microphone, and I feel ill. I think I become a different sort of pianist. That may be because I don't feel quite so free—I'm always worrying about the wrong notes. Or maybe I'm concerned that, having played a phrase one way, perhaps I should have played it another. I'm a bit inhibited. Occasionally, of course, I forget it all. No, I don't miss an audience. When I'm rehearsing in the studio I play very freely, but as soon as that light goes on . . . very strange".

She admires many of her pianist colleagues "but my god is Rubinstein, ever since I met him when I was a little girl. Kempff is another of my idols, specially in Schubert and Brahms. And in the younger generation, well, there are so many good players, it's really incredible. I try not to go and hear any of them just before I have a concert because it only depresses me! Then I have to say to myself, 'Go home and close the piano' ".

At recitals she considers it most important to have a good piano and for the acoustics of the hall to be fine. "I don't like the Queen Elizabeth Hall too much. Its reverberation is of the confusing kind: it doesn't add a bloom to your tone. I prefer the Festival Hall".

ALICIA DE LARROCHA
*Details of other recordings by this artist are listed in*
THE GRAMOPHONE
CLASSICAL RECORD CATALOGUE
*see page 702 for information*

She is very friendly with her fellow-countrywoman, Victoria de los Angeles. "We have given joint recitals. We had a big success together in a programme of Spanish music some eighteen months ago in New York. I've known her since she was 16 or 17 when she was in a radio competition. After she won it, she asked me to play for her in a test she had with HMV. She sang Mimi's and Butterfly's aria. We've been friends ever since and always try to go to each other's recitals".

The death of Soriano last year affected her deeply. "He was such a great-hearted person and an exceptional musician. He had been a great influence on me".

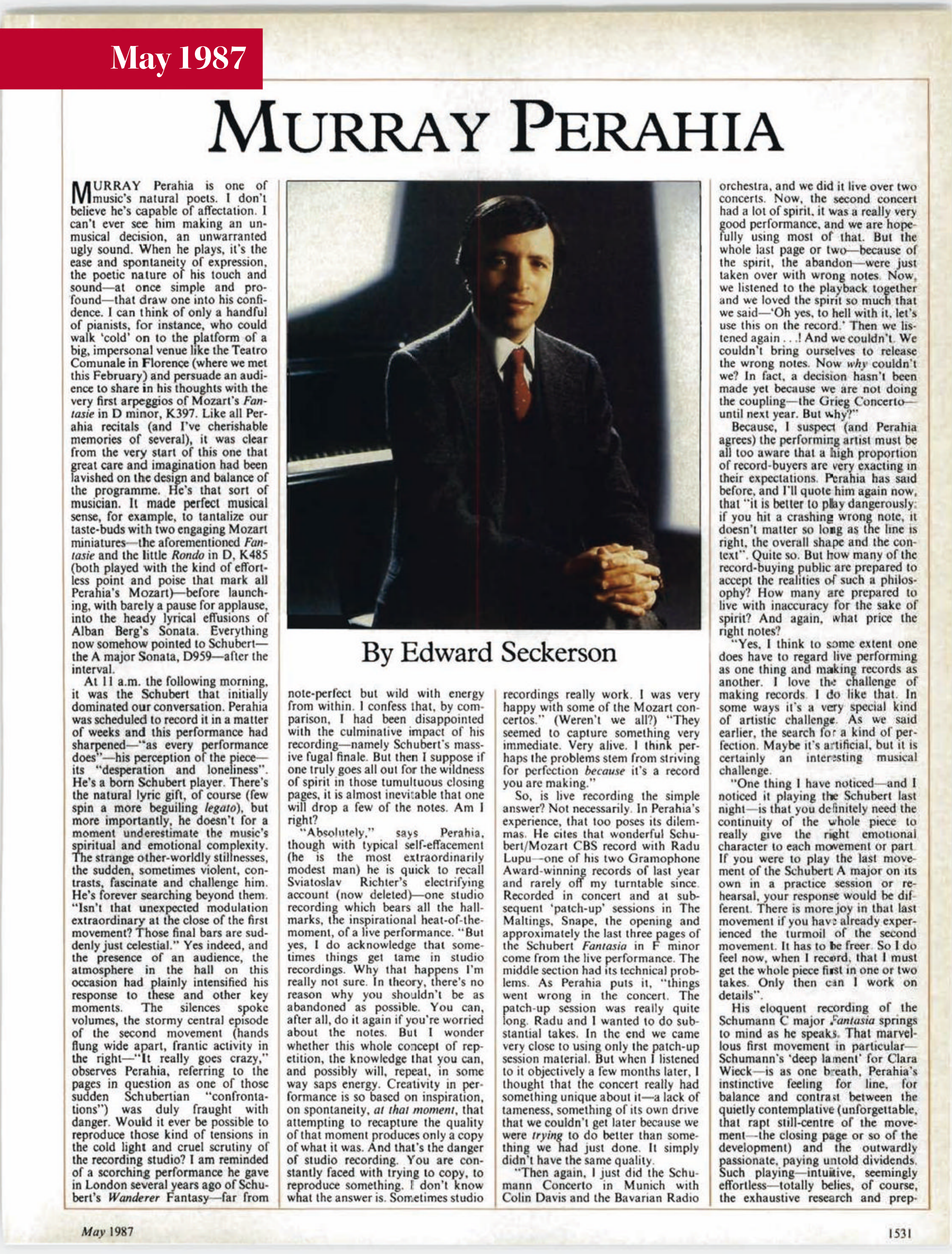
To meet, Larrocha is a little disconcerting because she is so tiny, only four feet nine inches tall. Her hands, for a pianist, are also very small. That naturally could have been a handicap to her, but in spite of the fact that her span is only about a ninth, she has little trouble with technique, overcoming difficulties with her own, new fingerings. She is a great believer in the importance of a rhythmic sense. "The first thing I have always said to my students is if you can't play Bach correctly, you can't play Spanish music. Both keep the rhythms strict. The Spanish style is like Chopin Mazurkas in some respects—free in the melody but solid at the bottom. Spanish music is more difficult than mazurkas but similar", and she illustrates the point at the piano.

Larrocha is, at heart, a very home-loving person, who does not care very much for meeting a lot of people or travelling a great deal. "Some years ago I didn't really like house-keeping. Nowadays it's my favourite occupation, together with looking after my family. My husband was also a Marshall student, but after we married he stopped playing and took over my management. We have a boy of 16 and a girl of 14. Both love music but they won't become professionals".

When we met she had just been recording part of *Iberia*, which is released this month and reviewed on page 695 of this issue. "I would like to do some Mozart soon and also more of the Romantic repertory, and Bartók and Prokofiev. We must see, but nothing too modern".

Her advice to young pianists? "I think they are too much in a hurry—always faster, faster. For me, art—music and everything—is something that comes little by little and needs time for development. Today, they want to do everything—boom, boom, boom, to start on the roof. I know that life is different from what it was, and it's hard for youngsters to hold back, but still I believe you can't, as it were, put a coin in a machine and expect maturity to come out the other end. Also, many pianists do not have sufficient sense of vocation: it's become too much of a profession. I've never thought of it like that. They might as well be an engineer or an architect. That's sad but maybe I'm a little old-fashioned. I remember always and vividly what Granados once said to a pupil, who came to him and said: 'Maestro, I want to play for you'. Granados asked him what he could play. The young man said he could ask for anything. Granados asked if he knew a Beethoven sonata: 'Yes, any one you like'. To which the composer said: 'You had better go home and when you can really play just one, come back to me'. That was the truth".

## May 1987



# MURRAY PERAHIA

### By Edward Seckerson

MURRAY Perahia is one of music's natural poets. I don't believe he's capable of affectation. I can't ever see him making an unmusical decision, an unwarranted ugly sound. When he plays, it's the ease and spontaneity of expression, the poetic nature of his touch and sound—at once simple and profound—that draw one into his confidence. I can think of only a handful of pianists, for instance, who could walk 'cold' on to the platform of a big, impersonal venue like the Teatro Comunale in Florence (where we met this February) and persuade an audience to share in his thoughts with the very first arpeggios of Mozart's *Fantasie* in D minor, K397. Like all Perahia recitals (and I've cherishable memories of several), it was clear from the very start of this one that great care and imagination had been lavished on the design and balance of the programme. He's that sort of musician. It made perfect musical sense, for example, to tantalize our taste-buds with two engaging Mozart miniatures—the aforementioned *Fantasie* and the little *Rondo* in D, K485 (both played with the kind of effortless point and poise that mark all Perahia's Mozart)—before launching, with barely a pause for applause, into the heady lyrical effusions of Alban Berg's Sonata. Everything now somehow pointed to Schubert—the A major Sonata, D959—after the interval.

At 11 a.m. the following morning, it was the Schubert that initially dominated our conversation. Perahia was scheduled to record it in a matter of weeks and this performance had sharpened—"as every performance does"—his perception of the piece—its "desperation and loneliness". He's a born Schubert player. There's the natural lyric gift, of course (few spin a more beguiling *legato*), but more importantly, he doesn't for a moment underestimate the music's spiritual and emotional complexity. The strange other-worldly stillnesses, the sudden, sometimes violent, contrasts, fascinate and challenge him. He's forever searching beyond them. "Isn't that unexpected modulation extraordinary at the close of the first movement? Those final bars are suddenly just celestial." Yes indeed, and the presence of an audience, the atmosphere in the hall on this occasion had plainly intensified his response to these and other key moments. The silences spoke volumes, the stormy central episode of the second movement (hands flung wide apart, frantic activity in the right—"It really goes crazy," observes Perahia, referring to the pages in question as one of those sudden Schubertian "confrontations") was duly fraught with danger. Would it ever be possible to reproduce those kind of tensions in the cold light and cruel scrutiny of the recording studio? I am reminded of a scorching performance he gave in London several years ago of Schubert's *Wanderer* Fantasy—far from note-perfect but wild with energy from within. I confess that, by comparison, I had been disappointed with the culminative impact of his recording—namely Schubert's massive fugal finale. But then I suppose if one truly goes all out for the wildness of spirit in those tumultuous closing pages, it is almost inevitable that one will drop a few of the notes. Am I right?

"Absolutely," says Perahia, though with typical self-effacement (he is the most extraordinarily modest man) he is quick to recall Sviatoslav Richter's electrifying account (now deleted)—one studio recording which bears all the hallmarks, the inspirational heat-of-the-moment, of a live performance. "But yes, I do acknowledge that sometimes things get tame in studio recordings. Why that happens I'm really not sure. In theory, there's no reason why you shouldn't be as abandoned as possible. You can, after all, do it again if you're worried about the notes. But I wonder whether this whole concept of repetition, the knowledge that you can, and possibly will, repeat, in some way saps energy. Creativity in performance is so based on inspiration, on spontaneity, *at that moment*, that attempting to recapture the quality of that moment produces only a copy of what it was. And that's the danger of studio recording. You are constantly faced with trying to copy, to reproduce something. I don't know what the answer is. Sometimes studio recordings really work. I was very happy with some of the Mozart concertos." (Weren't we all?) "They seemed to capture something very immediate. Very alive. I think perhaps the problems stem from striving for perfection *because* it's a record you are making."

So, is live recording the simple answer? Not necessarily. In Perahia's experience, that too poses its dilemmas. He cites that wonderful Schubert/Mozart CBS record with Radu Lupu—one of his two Gramophone Award-winning records of last year and rarely off my turntable since. Recorded in concert and at subsequent 'patch-up' sessions in The Maltings, Snape, the opening and approximately the last three pages of the Schubert *Fantasia* in F minor come from the live performance. The middle section had its technical problems. As Perahia puts it, "things went wrong in the concert. The patch-up session was really quite long. Radu and I wanted to do substantial takes. In the end we came very close to using only the patch-up session material. But when I listened to it objectively a few months later, I thought that the concert really had something unique about it—a lack of tameness, something of its own drive that we couldn't get later because we were *trying* to do better than something we had just done. It simply didn't have the same quality.

"Then again, I just did the Schumann Concerto in Munich with Colin Davis and the Bavarian Radio orchestra, and we did it live over two concerts. Now, the second concert had a lot of spirit, it was a really very good performance, and we are hopefully using most of that. But the whole last page or two—because of the spirit, the abandon—were just taken over with wrong notes. Now, we listened to the playback together and we loved the spirit so much that we said—'Oh yes, to hell with it, let's use this on the record.' Then we listened again . . .! And we couldn't. We couldn't bring ourselves to release the wrong notes. Now *why* couldn't we? In fact, a decision hasn't been made yet because we are not doing the coupling—the Grieg Concerto—until next year. But why?"

Because, I suspect (and Perahia agrees) the performing artist must be all too aware that a high proportion of record-buyers are very exacting in their expectations. Perahia has said before, and I'll quote him again now, that "it is better to play dangerously; if you hit a crashing wrong note, it doesn't matter so long as the line is right, the overall shape and the context". Quite so. But how many of the record-buying public are prepared to accept the realities of such a philosophy? How many are prepared to live with inaccuracy for the sake of spirit? And again, what price the right notes?

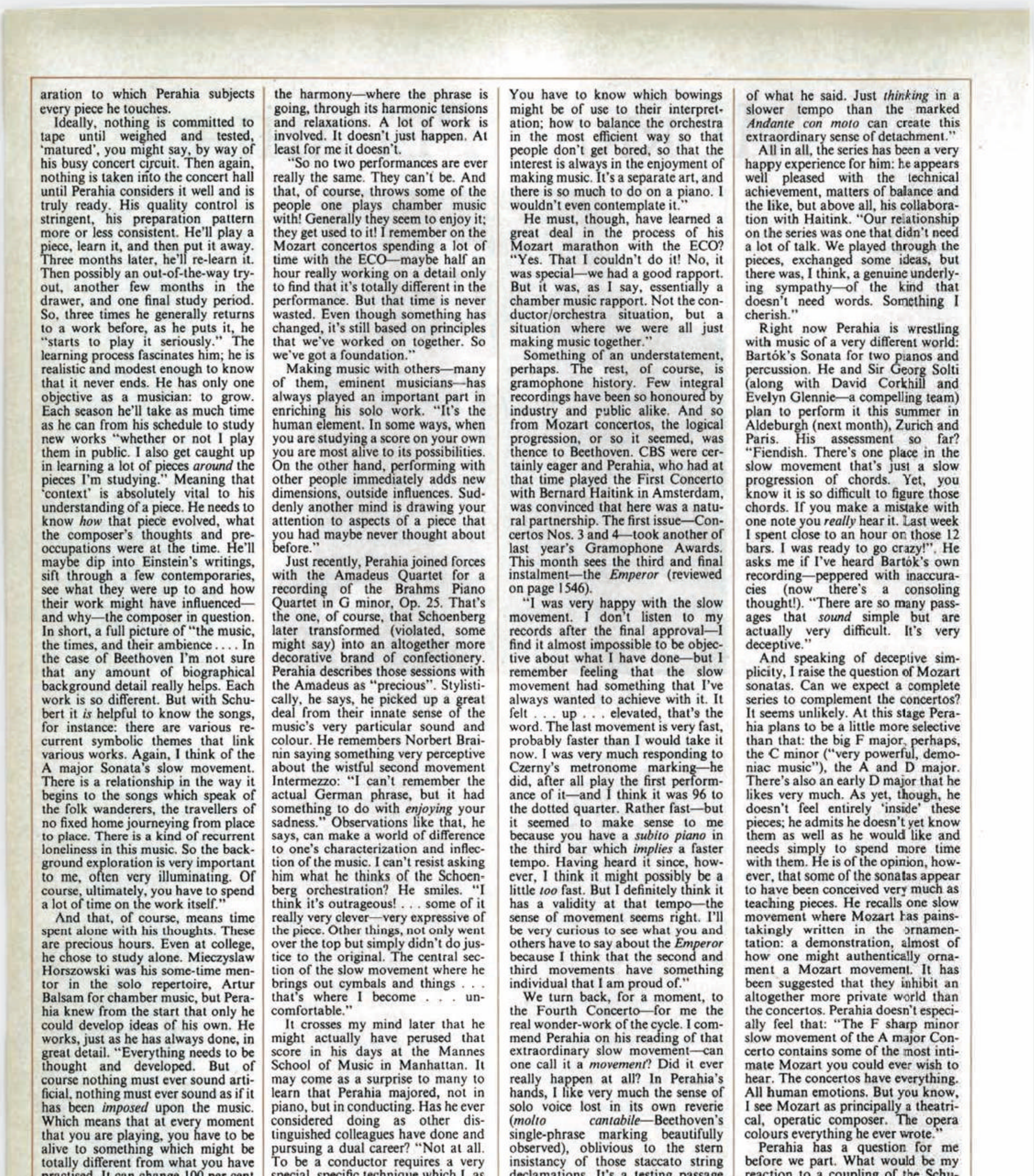
"Yes, I think to some extent one does have to regard live performing as one thing and making records as another. I love the challenge of making records. I do like that. In some ways it's a very special kind of artistic challenge. As we said earlier, the search for a kind of perfection. Maybe it's artificial, but it is certainly an interesting musical challenge.

"One thing I have noticed—and I noticed it playing the Schubert last night—is that you definitely need the continuity of the whole piece to really give the right emotional character to each movement or part. If you were to play the last movement of the Schubert A major on its own in a practice session or rehearsal, your response would be different. There is more joy in that last movement if you have already experienced the turmoil of the second movement. It has to be freer. So I do feel now, when I record, that I must get the whole piece first in one or two takes. Only then can I work on details".

His eloquent recording of the Schumann C major *Fantasia* springs to mind as he speaks. That marvellous first movement in particular—Schumann's 'deep lament' for Clara Wieck—is as one breath, Perahia's instinctive feeling for line, for balance and contrast between the quietly contemplative (unforgettable, that rapt still-centre of the movement—the closing page or so of the development) and the outwardly passionate, paying untold dividends. Such playing—intuitive, seemingly effortless—totally belies, of course, the exhaustive research and prep-

*May* 1987

1531



aration to which Perahia subjects every piece he touches.

Ideally, nothing is committed to tape until weighed and tested, 'matured', you might say, by way of his busy concert circuit. Then again, nothing is taken into the concert hall until Perahia considers it well and is truly ready. His quality control is stringent, his preparation pattern more or less consistent. He'll play a piece, learn it, and then put it away. Three months later, he'll re-learn it. Then possibly an out-of-the-way try-out, another few months in the drawer, and one final study period. So, three times he generally returns to a work before, as he puts it, he "starts to play it seriously." The learning process fascinates him; he is realistic and modest enough to know that it never ends. He has only one objective as a musician: to grow. Each season he'll take as much time as he can from his schedule to study new works "whether or not I play them in public. I also get caught up in learning a lot of pieces *around* the pieces I'm studying." Meaning that 'context' is absolutely vital to his understanding of a piece. He needs to know *how* that piece evolved, what the composer's thoughts and pre-occupations were at the time. He'll maybe dip into Einstein's writings, sift through a few contemporaries, see what they were up to and how their work might have influenced—and why—the composer in question. In short, a full picture of "the music, the times, and their ambience . . . . In the case of Beethoven I'm not sure that any amount of biographical background detail really helps. Each work is so different. But with Schubert it *is* helpful to know the songs, for instance: there are various recurrent symbolic themes that link various works. Again, I think of the A major Sonata's slow movement. There is a relationship in the way it begins to the songs which speak of the folk wanderers, the travellers of no fixed home journeying from place to place. There is a kind of recurrent loneliness in this music. So the background exploration is very important to me, often very illuminating. Of course, ultimately, you have to spend a lot of time on the work itself."

And that, of course, means time spent alone with his thoughts. These are precious hours. Even at college, he chose to study alone. Mieczyslaw Horszowski was his some-time mentor in the solo repertoire, Artur Balsam for chamber music, but Perahia knew from the start that only he could develop ideas of his own. He works, just as he has always done, in great detail. "Everything needs to be thought and developed. But of course nothing must ever sound artificial, nothing must ever sound as if it has been *imposed* upon the music. Which means that at every moment that you are playing, you have to be alive to something which might be totally different from what you have practised. It can change 100 per cent because the moment demands something else. I never expect to do exactly as I have prepared. It has to be alive at every moment, every time. And really the only way to cultivate this flexibility is through work on phrasing and its inevitability. And that's done through understanding the harmony—where the phrase is going, through its harmonic tensions and relaxations. A lot of work is involved. It doesn't just happen. At least for me it doesn't.

"So no two performances are ever really the same. They can't be. And that, of course, throws some of the people one plays chamber music with! Generally they seem to enjoy it; they get used to it! I remember on the Mozart concertos spending a lot of time with the ECO—maybe half an hour really working on a detail only to find that it's totally different in the performance. But that time is never wasted. Even though something has changed, it's still based on principles that we've worked on together. So we've got a foundation."

Making music with others—many of them, eminent musicians—has always played an important part in enriching his solo work. "It's the human element. In some ways, when you are studying a score on your own you are most alive to its possibilities. On the other hand, performing with other people immediately adds new dimensions, outside influences. Suddenly another mind is drawing your attention to aspects of a piece that you had maybe never thought about before."

Just recently, Perahia joined forces with the Amadeus Quartet for a recording of the Brahms Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25. That's the one, of course, that Schoenberg later transformed (violated, some might say) into an altogether more decorative brand of confectionery. Perahia describes those sessions with the Amadeus as "precious". Stylistically, he says, he picked up a great deal from their innate sense of the music's very particular sound and colour. He remembers Norbert Brainin saying something very perceptive about the wistful second movement Intermezzo: "I can't remember the actual German phrase, but it had something to do with *enjoying* your sadness." Observations like that, he says, can make a world of difference to one's characterization and inflection of the music. I can't resist asking him what he thinks of the Schoenberg orchestration? He smiles. "I think it's outrageous! . . . some of it really very clever—very expressive of the piece. Other things, not only went over the top but simply didn't do justice to the original. The central section of the slow movement where he brings out cymbals and things . . . that's where I become . . . uncomfortable."

It crosses my mind later that he might actually have perused that score in his days at the Mannes School of Music in Manhattan. It may come as a surprise to many to learn that Perahia majored, not in piano, but in conducting. Has he ever considered doing as other distinguished colleagues have done and pursuing a dual career? "Not at all. To be a conductor requires a very special, specific technique which I, as a pianist, don't have the time to develop. Not only that, you must develop the skills of persuading many people to respond to your wishes: you must develop the authority, the diplomacy. It's not enough to understand a symphonic work and try to transmit that to the orchestra. You have to know which bowings might be of use to their interpretation; how to balance the orchestra in the most efficient way so that people don't get bored, so that the interest is always in the enjoyment of making music. It's a separate art, and there is so much to do on a piano. I wouldn't even contemplate it."

He must, though, have learned a great deal in the process of his Mozart marathon with the ECO? "Yes. That I couldn't do it! No, it was special—we had a good rapport. But it was, as I say, essentially a chamber music rapport. Not the conductor/orchestra situation, but a situation where we were all just making music together."

Something of an understatement, perhaps. The rest, of course, is gramophone history. Few integral recordings have been so honoured by industry and public alike. And so from Mozart concertos, the logical progression, or so it seemed, was thence to Beethoven. CBS were certainly eager and Perahia, who had at that time played the First Concerto with Bernard Haitink in Amsterdam, was convinced that here was a natural partnership. The first issue—Concertos Nos. 3 and 4—took another of last year's Gramophone Awards. This month sees the third and final instalment—the *Emperor* (reviewed on page 1546).

"I was very happy with the slow movement. I don't listen to my records after the final approval—I find it almost impossible to be objective about what I have done—but I remember feeling that the slow movement had something that I've always wanted to achieve with it. It felt . . . up . . . elevated, that's the word. The last movement is very fast, probably faster than I would take it now. I was very much responding to Czerny's metronome marking—he did, after all play the first performance of it—and I think it was 96 to the dotted quarter. Rather fast—but it seemed to make sense to me because you have a *subito piano* in the third bar which *implies* a faster tempo. Having heard it since, however, I think it might possibly be a little *too* fast. But I definitely think it has a validity at that tempo—the sense of movement seems right. I'll be very curious to see what you and others have to say about the *Emperor* because I think that the second and third movements have something individual that I am proud of."

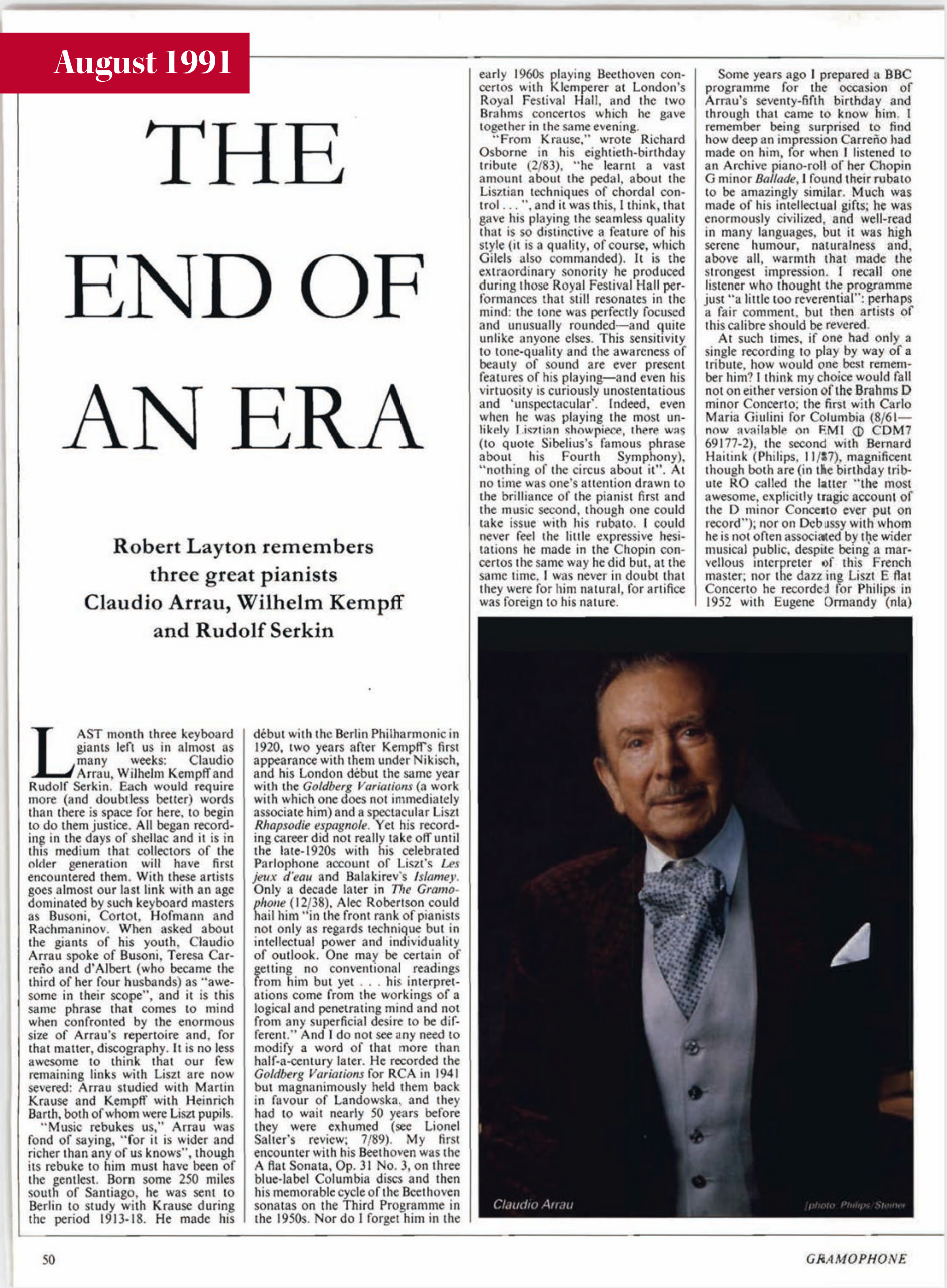
We turn back, for a moment, to the Fourth Concerto—for me the real wonder-work of the cycle. I commend Perahia on his reading of that extraordinary slow movement—can one call it a *movement*? Did it ever really happen at all? In Perahia's hands, I like very much the sense of solo voice lost in its own reverie (*molto cantabile*—Beethoven's single-phrase marking beautifully observed), oblivious to the stern insistancy of those staccato string declamations. It's a testing passage demanding Zen-like concentration. Apparently Carlo Maria Giulini (a performance that took place, interestingly enough, in Florence) even went so far as to suggest that the piano might 'co-exist' in a slightly different tempo. Perahia was not entirely convinced "but I took the point of what he said. Just *thinking* in a slower tempo than the marked *Andante con moto* can create this extraordinary sense of detachment."

All in all, the series has been a very happy experience for him: he appears well pleased with the technical achievement, matters of balance and the like, but above all, his collaboration with Haitink. "Our relationship on the series was one that didn't need a lot of talk. We played through the pieces, exchanged some ideas, but there was, I think, a genuine underlying sympathy—of the kind that doesn't need words. Something I cherish."

Right now Perahia is wrestling with music of a very different world: Bartók's Sonata for two pianos and percussion. He and Sir Georg Solti (along with David Corkhill and Evelyn Glennie—a compelling team) plan to perform it this summer in Aldeburgh (next month), Zurich and Paris. His assessment so far? "Fiendish. There's one place in the slow movement that's just a slow progression of chords. Yet, you know it is so difficult to figure those chords. If you make a mistake with one note you *really* hear it. Last week I spent close to an hour on those 12 bars. I was ready to go crazy!". He asks me if I've heard Bartók's own recording—peppered with inaccuracies (now there's a consoling thought!). "There are so many passages that *sound* simple but are actually very difficult. It's very deceptive."

And speaking of deceptive simplicity, I raise the question of Mozart sonatas. Can we expect a complete series to complement the concertos? It seems unlikely. At this stage Perahia plans to be a little more selective than that: the big F major, perhaps, the C minor ("very powerful, demoniac music"), the A and D major. There's also an early D major that he likes very much. As yet, though, he doesn't feel entirely 'inside' these pieces; he admits he doesn't yet know them as well as he would like and needs simply to spend more time with them. He is of the opinion, however, that some of the sonatas appear to have been conceived very much as teaching pieces. He recalls one slow movement where Mozart has painstakingly written in the ornamentation: a demonstration, almost of how one might authentically ornament a Mozart movement. It has been suggested that they inhibit an altogether more private world than the concertos. Perahia doesn't especially feel that: "The F sharp minor slow movement of the A major Concerto contains some of the most intimate Mozart you could ever wish to hear. The concertos have everything. All human emotions. But you know, I see Mozart as principally a theatrical, operatic composer. The opera colours everything he ever wrote."

Perahia has a question for me before we part. What would be my reaction to a coupling of the Schubert A major and the Berg Sonata? Very positive. I think it's a stimulating idea: the Berg placed first, of course; then back in time (almost 80 years) but forward in every other sense—emotionally, spiritually—to the Schubert. He agrees. I wonder if CBS will?



August 1991

# THE END OF AN ERA

### Robert Layton remembers three great pianists Claudio Arrau, Wilhelm Kempff and Rudolf Serkin

LAST month three keyboard giants left us in almost as many weeks: Claudio Arrau, Wilhelm Kempff and Rudolf Serkin. Each would require more (and doubtless better) words than there is space for here, to begin to do them justice. All began recording in the days of shellac and it is in this medium that collectors of the older generation will have first encountered them. With these artists goes almost our last link with an age dominated by such keyboard masters as Busoni, Cortot, Hofmann and Rachmaninov. When asked about the giants of his youth, Claudio Arrau spoke of Busoni, Teresa Carreño and d'Albert (who became the third of her four husbands) as "awesome in their scope", and it is this same phrase that comes to mind when confronted by the enormous size of Arrau's repertoire and, for that matter, discography. It is no less awesome to think that our few remaining links with Liszt are now severed: Arrau studied with Martin Krause and Kempff with Heinrich Barth, both of whom were Liszt pupils.

"Music rebukes us," Arrau was fond of saying, "for it is wider and richer than any of us knows", though its rebuke to him must have been of the gentlest. Born some 250 miles south of Santiago, he was sent to Berlin to study with Krause during the period 1913-18. He made his début with the Berlin Philharmonic in 1920, two years after Kempff's first appearance with them under Nikisch, and his London début the same year with the *Goldberg Variations* (a work with which one does not immediately associate him) and a spectacular Liszt *Rhapsodie espagnole*. Yet his recording career did not really take off until the late-1920s with his celebrated Parlophone account of Liszt's *Les jeux d'eau* and Balakirev's *Islamey*. Only a decade later in *The Gramophone* (12/38), Alec Robertson could hail him "in the front rank of pianists not only as regards technique but in intellectual power and individuality of outlook. One may be certain of getting no conventional readings from him but yet . . . his interpretations come from the workings of a logical and penetrating mind and not from any superficial desire to be different." And I do not see any need to modify a word of that more than half-a-century later. He recorded the *Goldberg Variations* for RCA in 1941 but magnanimously held them back in favour of Landowska, and they had to wait nearly 50 years before they were exhumed (see Lionel Salter's review; 7/89). My first encounter with his Beethoven was the A flat Sonata, Op. 31 No. 3, on three blue-label Columbia discs and then his memorable cycle of the Beethoven sonatas on the Third Programme in the 1950s. Nor do I forget him in the early 1960s playing Beethoven concertos with Klemperer at London's Royal Festival Hall, and the two Brahms concertos which he gave together in the same evening.

"From Krause," wrote Richard Osborne in his eightieth-birthday tribute (2/83), "he learnt a vast amount about the pedal, about the Lisztian techniques of chordal control . . . ", and it was this, I think, that gave his playing the seamless quality that is so distinctive a feature of his style (it is a quality, of course, which Gilels also commanded). It is the extraordinary sonority he produced during those Royal Festival Hall performances that still resonates in the mind: the tone was perfectly focused and unusually rounded—and quite unlike anyone elses. This sensitivity to tone-quality and the awareness of beauty of sound are ever present features of his playing—and even his virtuosity is curiously unostentatious and 'unspectacular'. Indeed, even when he was playing the most unlikely Lisztian showpiece, there was (to quote Sibelius's famous phrase about his Fourth Symphony), "nothing of the circus about it". At no time was one's attention drawn to the brilliance of the pianist first and the music second, though one could take issue with his rubato. I could never feel the little expressive hesitations he made in the Chopin concertos the same way he did but, at the same time, I was never in doubt that they were for him natural, for artifice was foreign to his nature.

Some years ago I prepared a BBC programme for the occasion of Arrau's seventy-fifth birthday and through that came to know him. I remember being surprised to find how deep an impression Carreño had made on him, for when I listened to an Archive piano-roll of her Chopin G minor *Ballade*, I found their rubato to be amazingly similar. Much was made of his intellectual gifts; he was enormously civilized, and well-read in many languages, but it was high serene humour, naturalness and, above all, warmth that made the strongest impression. I recall one listener who thought the programme just "a little too reverential": perhaps a fair comment, but then artists of this calibre should be revered.

At such times, if one had only a single recording to play by way of a tribute, how would one best remember him? I think my choice would fall not on either version of the Brahms D minor Concerto; the first with Carlo Maria Giulini for Columbia (8/61—now available on EMI ⓓ CDM7 69177-2), the second with Bernard Haitink (Philips, 11/87), magnificent though both are (in the birthday tribute RO called the latter "the most awesome, explicitly tragic account of the D minor Concerto ever put on record"); nor on Debussy with whom he is not often associated by the wider musical public, despite being a marvellous interpreter of this French master; nor the dazzling Liszt E flat Concerto he recorded for Philips in 1952 with Eugene Ormandy (nla)

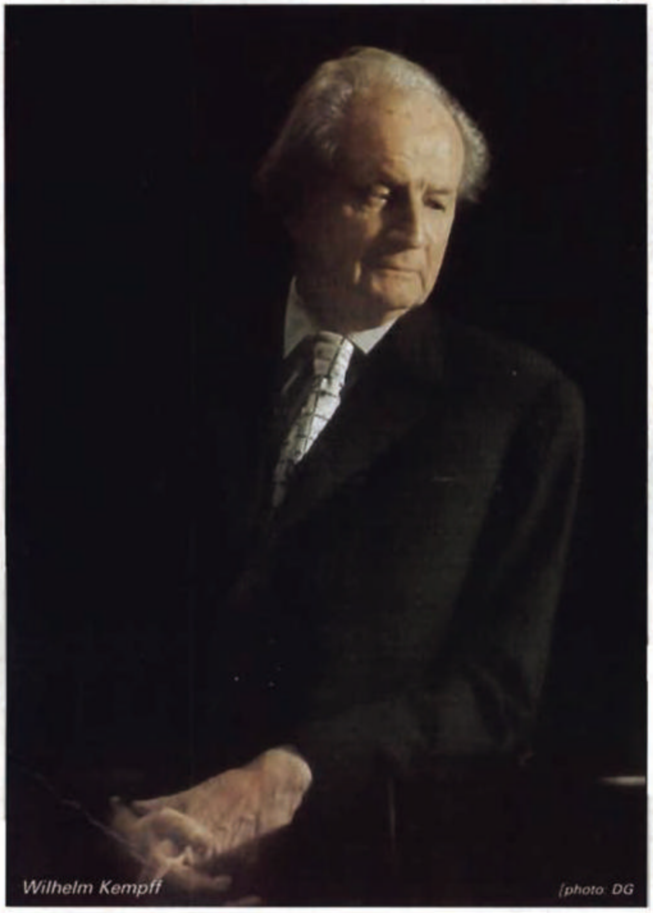
Claudio Arrau

[photo: Philips/Steiner

which he told me was done virtually in one take. No, it would, I think, be to his *Hammerklavier* (now reissued by Philips—to be reviewed later) that I would turn, and particularly its slow movement which represents his art at its most consummate.

Mention of the *Hammerklavier* prompts one's thoughts to turn to Wilhelm Kempff, who made records even before Arrau. His first recording at the Polydor studios in Berlin (the Beethoven C major *Bagatelle*, Op. 33 and the *Ecossaises*) was made as early as 1920. And for many years in the late 1930s and 1940s, his *Hammerklavier* was the version most admired. Although he recorded his first complete cycle of the Beethoven sonatas in the days of 78rpm records, it was his first LP set on DG (1950-52—nla) and the concertos (1953—nla, with Paul van Kempen and the Berlin Philharmonic) that brought him wider celebrity outside Germany. And so in the 1950s, his was the 'voice' of Beethoven for a new generation in much the same way as Schnabel's had been before the war. For Kempff, as with Arrau, d'Albert was also a revelation: he played the *Appassionata* "as if all before him had been deaf to its message". The same might also have been said of Kempff's own performances of Liszt and the Schubert B flat Sonatas, which were issued in the early days of LP when he briefly appeared on Decca. In the Liszt, display was conspicuously at the service of musical ends, and as with all great pianists, one took technical prowess for granted, ceasing to notice it except in passing. It was the range of poetic feeling that he uncovered in Liszt that was so striking.

Kempff once wrote of the Beethoven concertos, "each performance gives me the feeling that it is a unique event, a ceremonial act. This well-nigh miraculous quality which the works possess, of appearing always as fresh and splendid as at a first hearing, can only be due to the presence in them of hidden powers." And it was Kempff's achievement to reveal this afresh on each occasion he played in the studio. Whether in his second post-war cycle of the Beethoven Sonatas or in his partnership with Fournier and Menuhin in the trios, and the violin and cello sonatas, there were always new insights. His playing was never touched by routine, and his Schubert and Schumann surveys are equally illuminating. Kempff's last utterances for the gramophone, when he was already in his mid-eighties, were a dozen Bach Preludes and Fugues: performances that united a youthful freshness of tone with the wisdom of his years. His Olympian mid-1960s second set of the Beethoven sonatas has recently been reissued (DG, 3/91): his Bach and his six-LP set of Schumann must surely follow soon. Like Furtwängler, Kempff was a composer and so brought the insights of a creative mind to his playing.


Wilhelm Kempff [photo DG

Rudolf Serkin [photo: Sony Classical

Rudolf Serkin similarly studied composition, in his native Vienna with Schoenberg, no less, and Joseph Marx. He also recorded extensively for HMV before the war with Adolf Busch whom he met in 1920 and whose daughter, Irene, he eventually married. A few weeks younger than Arrau, he made his first record at about the same time albeit as Busch's partner and went on recording into his mid-eighties. Serkin possessed a musical mind of stature and was a pianist of remarkable character and depth; the late-lamented William Mann spoke of his brightness of tone and of him "often singing and clattering his heels on the floor". None of that is discernible in his remarkable 1938 HMV account with the Busch Chamber Players of the Mozart E flat Concerto, K449, the soul of elegance, or his playing in the Fifth *Brandenberg* Concerto with the same orchestra and Marcel Moyse (both nla): these are keenly sensitive and deeply musical accounts. The Busch/Serkin partnership is celebrated on CD by an EMI disc of two Beethoven sonatas (8/90), and time has not dimmed memories of his magnificent Brahms F minor Quintet and the Schubert C major *Fantasy* made with Busch (the latter now on EMI, 4/88).

The war took him to the United States where he settled, making impressive recordings with Toscanini (Beethoven's G major Concerto—RCA, nla) and later on, in the 1950s, some magisterial Brahms concertos for CBS, first with Ormandy (nla) and then Szell (7/91). These had a leonine quality that won wide admiration—and rightly so. From 1939 until 1975 his formidable powers were consumed by his work in the piano department of the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, the last eight years of which he held the post of Director. The enormous energy and personality of his music-making, be it with Casals or at the Marlboro Festival, whose guiding spirit he was, greatly enriched the musical scene. In later years, in his pursuit of truth he seemed to place less store by sheer beauty of sound—at an Edinburgh Festival in the 1960s I recall him rounding off phrases in a Mozart concerto in a very down-to-earth and inelegant way.

Serkin was an uncompromising advocate of the great classical repertoire, though I would not want him to be remembered by DG's Mozart cycle on which he embarked with Abbado in his early eighties. But the legacy of his earlier records is rich enough: his masterly account of the Reger F minor Concerto (recently reissued by Sony Classical—to be reviewed later) should not be forgotten. His pre-war version of the E flat Concerto, K449 has unfortunately never been transferred to LP, let alone CD, in the UK. But during the next few months Sony will be sifting through a number of hitherto unreleased Serkin performances from the Marlboro Archives. What treasures lie waiting to be uncovered there, I wonder?

# Digital convenience

The latest product in Casio's popular Privia range of digital pianos, the PX-S7000, combines beauty and flexibility with a great sound. **Colin Clarke** puts it through its paces

Costing in the region of £2000, it's fair to say that the Casio Privia PX-S7000 punches above its weight – given that it weighs a mere 14.8 kgs. (Quick-release bolts hold it in place on a stand; a three-pedal unit is easy to attach and detach.) The keyboard itself benefits from a smart-scaled hammer action along with keys with spruce sides that enable a less plasticky feel than you find on some digital pianos. The PX-S7000 also comes with a smart fabric cover. There is a four-speaker, 32-watt surround system that one can adjust according to room placement – testing it at the Casio offices in Wembley, London, the sound was fantastically real and believable. A WU-BT10 Bluetooth adaptor and MIDI adaptor are included. At the back of the instrument are slots for USB storage, a mic input, left/right line outputs and a pedal input.

There were surprises aplenty auditioning this particular instrument. The keyboard can be split for teaching purposes (so you have two middle Cs) or it can be split so the lower half plays one set of sounds and the top another (useful for jazz, for example, if you want a walking bass in the left hand and a bright treble extemporisation in the right). Most importantly, for all its bells and whistles and approximately 400 programmable sounds, the Casio PX-S7000 comes remarkably close to the touch and sound of a traditional hammer-action instrument. The more traditionally minded reader (like myself) would probably only use a small selection of the settings regularly. Each of the three pianos (Hamburg, New York and Berlin – they cannot use brand names) has three settings: mellow, medium and bright; in addition, damper and string resonance can also be adjusted. Personal choice of which company's piano to play comes in here in a way one cannot realistically enjoy with traditional pianos: I found the 'Hamburg bright' rather uncomfortable, for example (although the Berlin bright is even more so), while the 'Hamburg mellow' rather felt as if the soft pedal was permanently down. The core pianos work remarkably well, however – it is worth bearing in mind that the PX-S7000's sound is derived from Casio Grand Hybrid instruments. Various concert halls are simulated, although again they are not explicitly named. Sound layering is available, so it can be made to feel as if a string orchestra is shadowing your every key depression, for example.

The Casio PX-S7000

Most important among the Casio PX-S7000's controls is the illuminated touch ring in the centre, directly in front of the player. This is invaluable for navigating the menus, allowing quick and smooth access to an array of electric pianos, synths, orchestral sounds and so on … even a choir! In addition to the front panel, there are a number of controls at the side, including a pitch control (which definitely has restricted usefulness but is handy if you have a sudden urge to imitate an ondes martenot). There is also the option for what Casio calls 'Hit pianos': the sound of a keyboard encountered in pop hits such as *Taxi* or songs by Billy Joel or John Lennon, for example. And to go from pop to Baroque, the actual pitch can be modified from A=440Hz if required; more excitingly still, a range of tuning systems are available, including Werckmeister, Pythagorean and a variety of ethnic tunings.

A set of programmable function keys are assignable for convenience. There is much attention to detail here: there are two headphone jacks (previously I had to make sure I brought a headphone jack adaptor along in case I had the wrong fit). The unit itself can also be controlled via the astonishingly sleek Casio app, 'Music Space', which is a delight in itself and a triumph of programming; and should you wish to, you can play along with your favourite songs using Bluetooth. Some will find the music score and lesson features useful. Coupling between phone and keyboard was easily and quickly managed.

If you are out of reach of a power socket (or in the midst of a power cut) the unit can be powered by 8xAA batteries (an AC power adaptor is included). The Casio PX-S7000 includes all the features one would associate with a digital piano, including the ability to record oneself and play back. Indeed, this is one of the few digital pianos that I would very much like to have in my home. IP

*For more details of the PX-S7000 see casio.co.uk*

# RETURNING TO THE PIANO

A technical refresher course for recommencing piano enthusiasts, created for *International Piano* by Murray McLachlan

## VI – Shape and rhythm (Part 2)

### Parlando: 'To be or not to be, that is the question'

Let us continue by considering parallels between words and music. The term *parlando* is useful to keep in mind as an ideal in contexts where we may wish to emulate the oratory of a great actor or speaker. Try making words up to the main melodies in all your pieces. Can you show convincing phrase structure and direction literally through 'speaking' your melodies from start to finish?

Dame Fanny Waterman once famously used the opening of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to illustrate how leaning on or emphasising individual words or syllables in a single line of prose can totally transform the meaning and context of a phrase. We can add pauses in various places, breathe in towards certain words, breathe out in various places. We can crescendo for part of the time and diminuendo for the rest. All of these possibilities are open to variation. It is enjoyable and informative to extend this approach to even the simplest of musical phrases that we can sing and play aloud. And even before this, it is inspiring and helpful to make up words for the notes in the main melodies of the pieces you are preparing. Can you find appropriate sentences that will enhance the shape of a particular phrase you are working on but dissatisfied with? This has been done by musicians for centuries – such as Ebenezer Prout's famous, often highly amusing collection of 48 sentences to go with each opening subject in every fugue of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*!

### Vocalisation

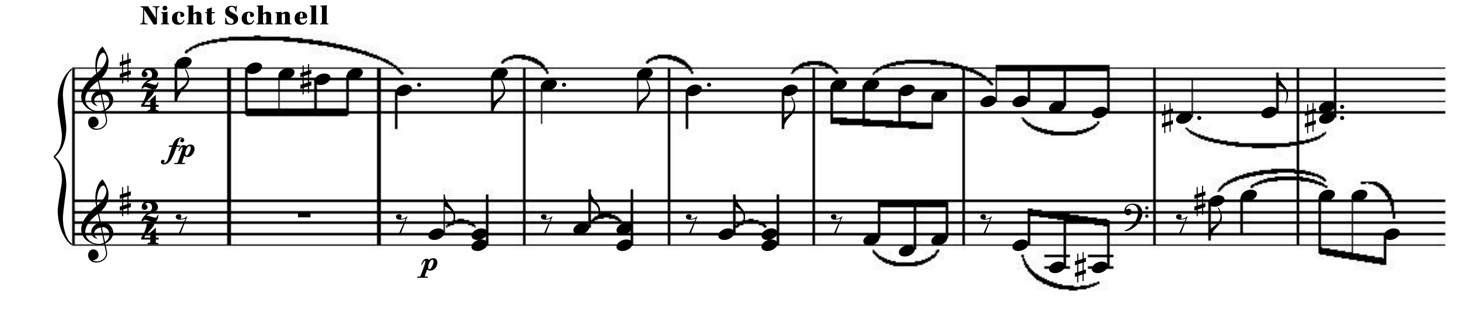
If we use our vocal cords, our musical instincts and training help us to find convincing points to move towards and away from in everything we play. There are always natural ways to shape a phrase, and it can be helpful to sing it out loud before you attempt to play it. Singing and breathing can and should guide appropriate speeds, too. Though motoric music from post-1900 is a notable exception, it is worth questioning tempos that seem right on pianistic grounds but which are uncomfortable when sung. Find tempos that are compatible with natural breath control. Experiment with speed by singing the tenderly expressive miniature 'Erster Verlust' (First Loss) from Schumann's *Album for the Young*, Op 68 – see Example 1. Here it would be easy to take too much time on each individual quaver note and have to stop for air in inappropriate places as a result. It is far more convincing if the music can proceed with singular exhales and inhales at moments appropriate to the musical flow (try exhaling from the opening to the end of bar four, then gradually inhaling as the music moves to a half close at the end of bar eight).

### Shading and breathing

Singing melodic lines will naturally involve a sense of subtle, constantly undulating dynamic variation. Expressivity lends a sense of wave-like contour to the phrasing. A line that is vocally charged by the performer should never feel flat or monochrome; it will often crescendo as it rises and diminuendo as it falls. As pianists we need to remember this constantly, because it is all too easy for us to depress a series of keys in a uniform manner with no dynamic shading whatsoever. Pianists need to be mindful of the fact that keys can be pressed without any real thought. We need to give attention and consideration to things like large intervals, harmonic shifts, and changes in texture and tessitura. Our fingers should feel like extensions of our lungs. Quite often it will be appropriate to play the first note of a phrase with intensity, then diminuendo consistently from that opening note to the end of the phrase. At other times it will feel more characterful to begin quietly as if breathing in, moving with a crescendo towards the highest note in the phrase, before exhaling as a diminuendo leads to a cadential close.

### Rubato

Though rubato is often done purely on instinct by talented players, and though there is certainly a place in improvisation and quasi-improvised passages for rhythmic freedom, it is worth identifying two basic, contrasting ways in which we can allow flexibility of pulse in phrasing to work in our favour. This holds true for most of the standard repertoire.



***Example 1* ••• Schumann** *Erster Verlust, Op 68 No 16, bars 1-8*

Murray McLachlan: *our fingers should feel like extensions of our lungs*

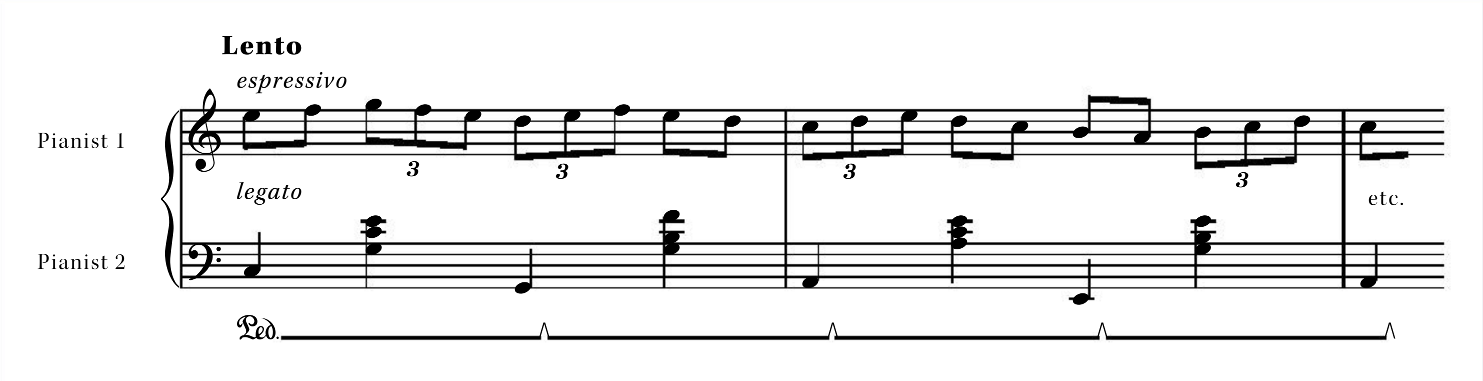
'Chopin' or melodic rubato: Robert Schumann's famous description of Chopin performing with a strict pulse in the left hand and a meanderingly quixotic right hand gives us an evocative insight into 'melodic rubato'. This can also be heard in popular and jazz contexts when a solo singer shapes the melodic line expressively – but without strictly synchronising on every beat with the rest of the band. Judy Garland's final performance of 'Over the rainbow' illustrates this perfectly: **https://youtu.be/fJGRL4Gqz1Q**

Perhaps the easiest way to get used to melodic rubato is to work with a duet partner. Take an example such as that given below (Example 2). One pianist plays the left hand strictly, while the other experiments playing the right-hand part with rubato, lingering on certain notes and speeding up on others. There must be points at which the two pianists (hands) coordinate and synchronise, but it would be wrong to be prescriptively formulaic about how this is achieved. There has to be a natural physicality about the approach, and this will come from extended experimentation. As is almost always the case in music-making, conviction will come from sensitive self-listening allied to vocalisation and an awareness of how the rhythm feels physically.

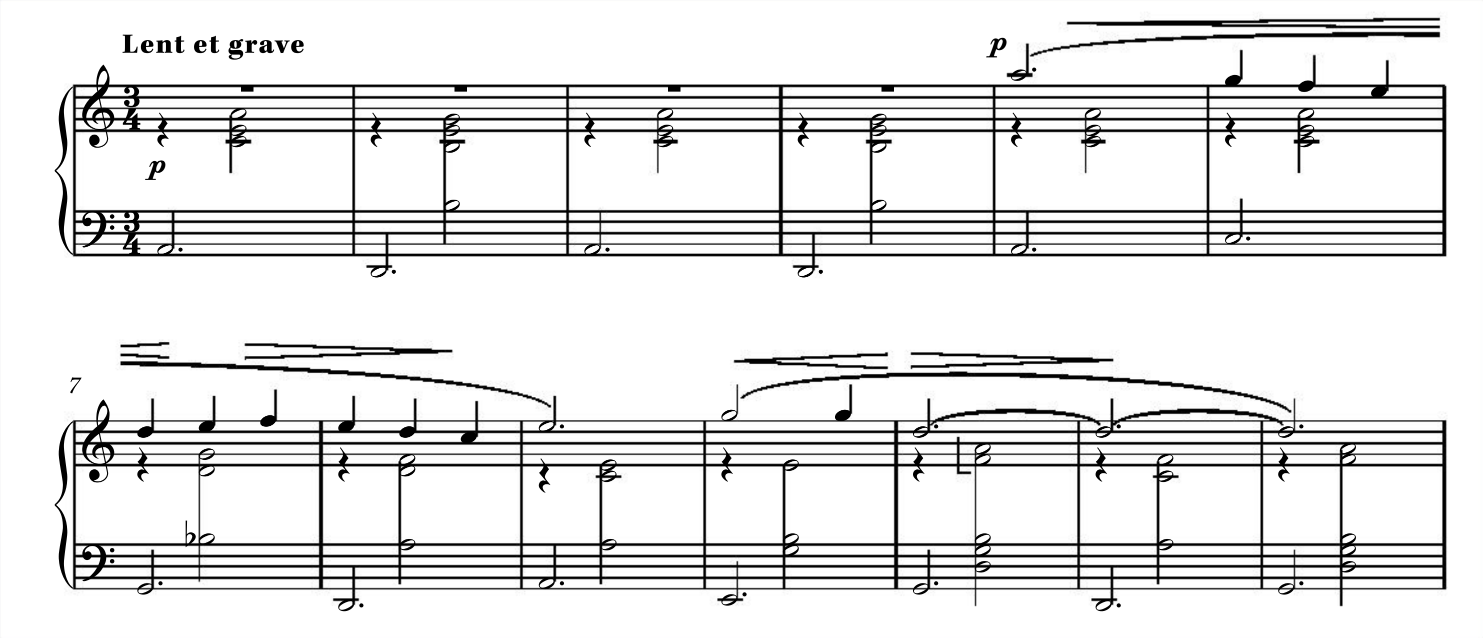
Agogic rubato: the 19th-century musicologist Hugo Riemann first used the word 'agogics' to describe fineries of performance practice that exploit bending, extending and contracting – desirable interpretative attributes that are musically convincing when the performer is able to make up for temporary indulgences by playing notes faster or slower immediately afterwards. If we dwell on particular notes, speed up or slow down, then so-called 'agogic' rubato can help re-establish a sense of equilibrium and balance. (After all, rubato literally means 'borrowed time'.) In its most subtle form, this can be exploited effectively when you delay or extend dotted notes for dramatic effect. It can have a profoundly expressive effect on accentuation whereby beats are delayed or played *subito piano* for characterful flavour in, say, a Chopin mazurka. There are countless other possibilities and examples. Think of it like borrowing money from a bank and paying it back so that your balance remains in credit. In practice this often means that a striking chromaticism, long notes or chords or large intervallic leaps are extended significantly, and less significant notes that follow are played faster.

## All-in-one rubato, unity and the grand line

Agogic rubato works well when rhythmic distortion is combined with appropriate shading. You can use the pedal as a means of projecting rhythmic flexibility, too, using more of it as you move towards a particular pivotal chord or interval. Indeed, rubato must be emotionally projected. You need to feel a sense of onward momentum and



***Example 2*** ••• *Melodic rubato will involve some desynchronisation between the hands and it can be easier to experiment with two players*



***Example 3* ••• *Satie* *Gymnopédie No 3, bars 1-13***

achievement when you arrive at a climax or peak, before relaxing and unfolding. Keep your inner sense of pulse strong as you inwardly conduct your performance towards and away from significant moments. Always feel a delayed tenuto long note and the consequent acceleration of short notes that must follow in a physical rather than a purely intellectual way.

Using this approach can be an effective way of unifying your interpretations. You can project the structure of a movement by harnessing everything at your disposal in order to show where the big climax is – the moment that Rachmaninov referred to as 'the point'. If you are moving towards a pivotal moment you can accelerate, add more pedal, crescendo and intensify your characterisation. Try to feel a smooth sense of inevitability about the music as it moves forwards then recedes. Can you step away from the instrument and literally conduct everything you want to do, hearing the results in your inner ear and moving physically with your arms and body to convey the musical momentum?

When you step back, try not to get bogged down in each individual beat. Try 'telescopic' conducting in Satie's *Gymnopédie* No 3 above (Example 3). Try to conduct this so that you bounce off the first note in each bar, making bars feel more like beats. Can you make four bars seem like a single bar in 4/4? When this becomes easy to do, try to feel two bars as a single 'beat' so that eight bars become a single bar, then try four. It should feel like the aural equivalent of changing focus on a pair of binoculars!

Ultimately, concentration and focus on phrasing will give you tremendous inner security and conviction. You should strive to reach the point where you never think in performance of single notes in isolation. Connect and connect again. At the highest interpretative level great performances are able to unfold enormous structures and lines with no sense of disturbance. There will be flexibility, space and repose at times, but the melodic line, the connecting thread of the piece, remains intact. Listening through rests, avoiding bumps on repeated notes, changing the pedal immediately after harmonic changes … all these things can help to bring a unified authority to your phrasing. Finding a way to project details while still joining everything into a cohesive whole will come more easily with breath control and a sense of physical connection. IP

**Unlimited sheet music for (even) less**

*International Piano* subscribers can now enjoy a **20% discount on nkoda**, the world's greatest library of sheet music on subscription.

From sonatas to symphonies, nkoda features more than 110,000 scores from over 90 publishers. The nkoda app makes accessing, annotating and sharing sheet music easy; mark-up, take offline and play handsfree with a Bluetooth pedal.

**Claim your discount at www.rhinegold.co.uk/ip-nkoda**

Download on the App Store | GET IT ON Google play | Download on the Mac App Store | Get it from Microsoft

nkoda

# Discover a library of sheet music in our digital archive

Scores from past issues of *International Piano* are available to download from our digital archive.

Download more than 150 piano pieces, plus masterclasses on performing key works written by leading pianists.

international Piano
EXPERT ADVICE FOR EVERY PIANO ENTHUSIAST
INSIDE 18 PAGES OF FREE SHEET MUSIC
NICOLAS NAMORADZE
Turning imagination into reality as a performer and composer
ARE YOU READY FOR THE FUTURE?
Ingolf Wunder on musicality in the age of AI
FIERCE CONVICTION
Celebrating legendary Chopin interpreter Fou Ts'ong
PLUS Ronan O'Hora unravels the mysteries of Beethoven's Tempest Sonata
International courses for amateur pianists in 2022
Lullaby
Andantino

## Subscribe to our 'digital' or 'print & digital' packages today

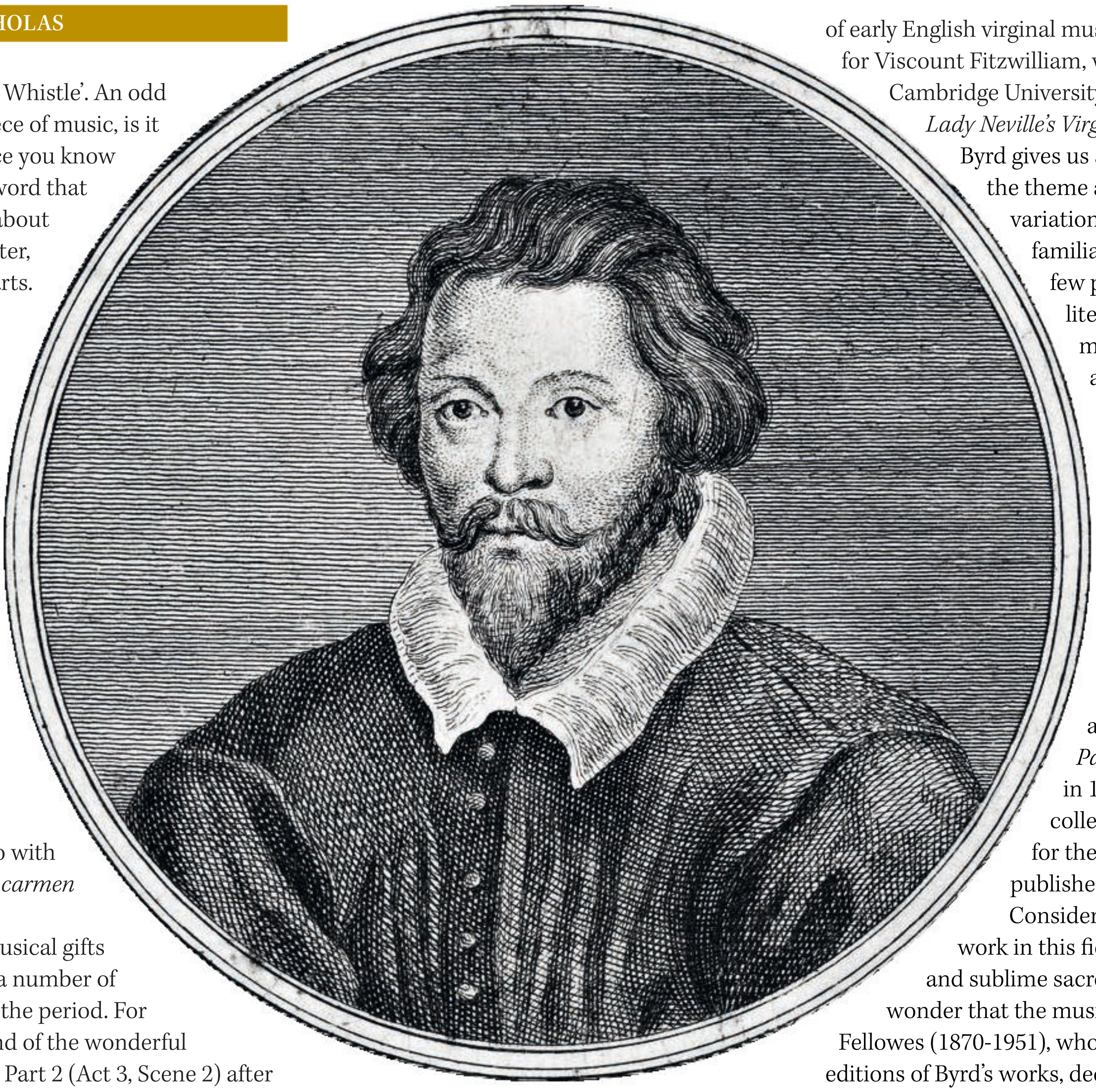
www.magsubscriptions.com/international-piano ☎ +44 (0)1722 716997 @ subscriptions@markallengroup.com

International Piano

## William Byrd

# The Carman’s Whistle

**BY JEREMY NICHOLAS**



‘The Carman’s Whistle’. An odd title for a piece of music, is it not? Less odd once you know that a carman, a word that came into use in about 1580, means a carter, one who drives carts. But then, what is so special about a carter’s whistle? It seems that in the 16th and 17th centuries, carmen were famous for their musical abilities, in particular their ability to whistle tunes. These were, apparently, particularly effective dealing with their horses. So – nothing to do with Bizet or the Latin *carmen* (a tune or song).

The carmen’s musical gifts are attested to in a number of texts and plays of the period. For instance, at the end of the wonderful scene in Henry IV Part 2 (Act 3, Scene 2) after Justices Shallow and Silence have departed, Falstaff tells us of Shallow’s exaggerated boasts of his youth, and that he ‘… came ever in the rearward of the fashion, and sung those tunes to the overscutch’d huswifes that he heard the carmen whistle, and sware they were his fancies or his good-nights’.

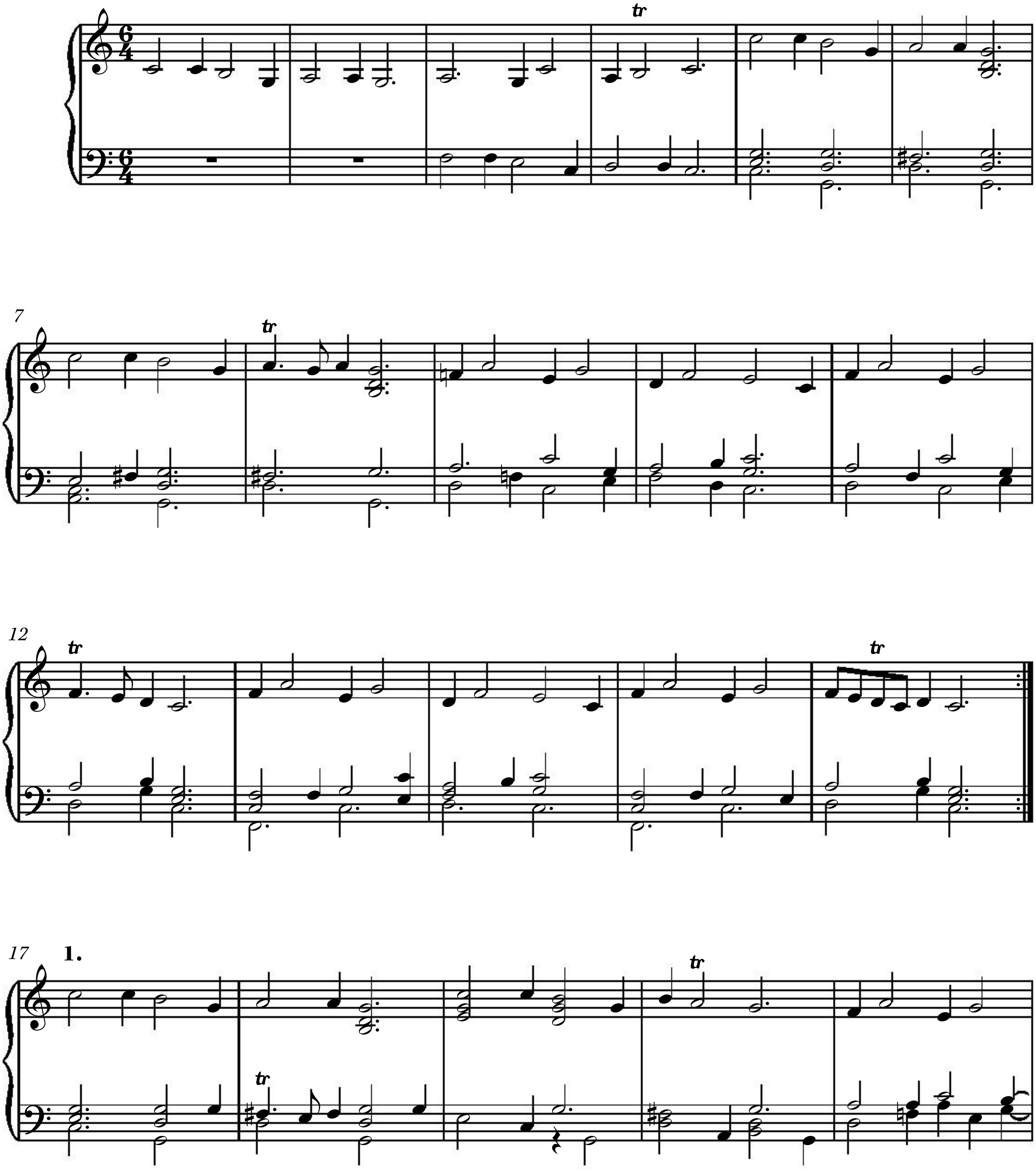
From around this time, we find an anonymously attributed broadside (or ballad) called *The Courteous Carman and the Amorous Maid: Or, The Carman’s Whistle*, printed in 1590 in Pye Corner, a somewhat seedy area of the City of London near Pudding Lane. There were 12 verses. In Chappell’s *Old English Popular Music* (1859), seven verses were omitted as ‘not suitable for publication in this work’. Investigation by your correspondent reveals some mildly saucy lyrics that make plain that a carman’s whistle, used to seduce a young maid, could also refer to a part of the carman’s anatomy.

The tune appears with variations by William Byrd (1543-1623) in the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*, the most valuable collection of early English virginal music (named for Viscount Fitzwilliam, who left it to Cambridge University in 1816) and in *Lady Neville’s Virginal Book* (1591). Byrd gives us an introduction, the theme and then eight variations. This format, so familiar to us now, had few precedents in the literature of keyboard music. Byrd created a whole library of preludes, voluntaries, fantasias and dances for the virginal, about 140 pieces in all. One of his most celebrated pieces, *The Earl of Salisbury’s Pavane* appeared in his *Parthenia* issued in 1612-13, the first collection of music for the virginal ever published in England. Considering his pioneering work in this field, his madrigals and sublime sacred music, it is no wonder that the musicologist Edmund Fellowes (1870-1951), who made important editions of Byrd’s works, declared him to be ‘unhesitatingly in the first flight of the world’s composers’.

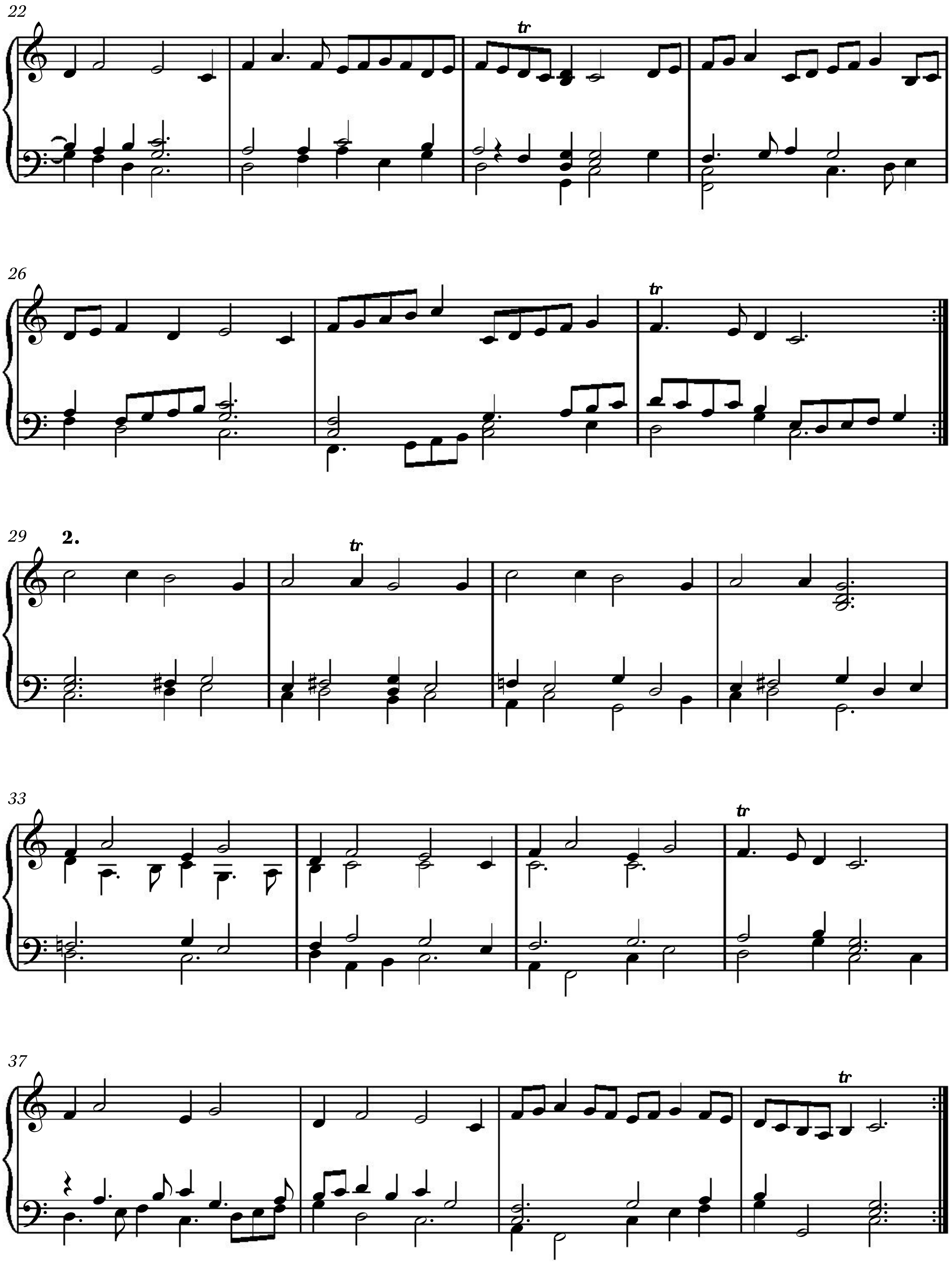
In 1885, Anton Rubinstein presented the first of his great historical concerts in which he embraced the entire literature of the piano as it then existed in seven recitals. These were given in Berlin, Vienna, St Petersburg, Moscow, Paris and finished, in June 1886, in London. And the piece that opened Recital 1 before proceeding to Bull, Couperin, Rameau, Scarlatti and Bach? Byrd – *The Carman’s Whistle*. **IP**

# The Carman's Whistle
# Variée

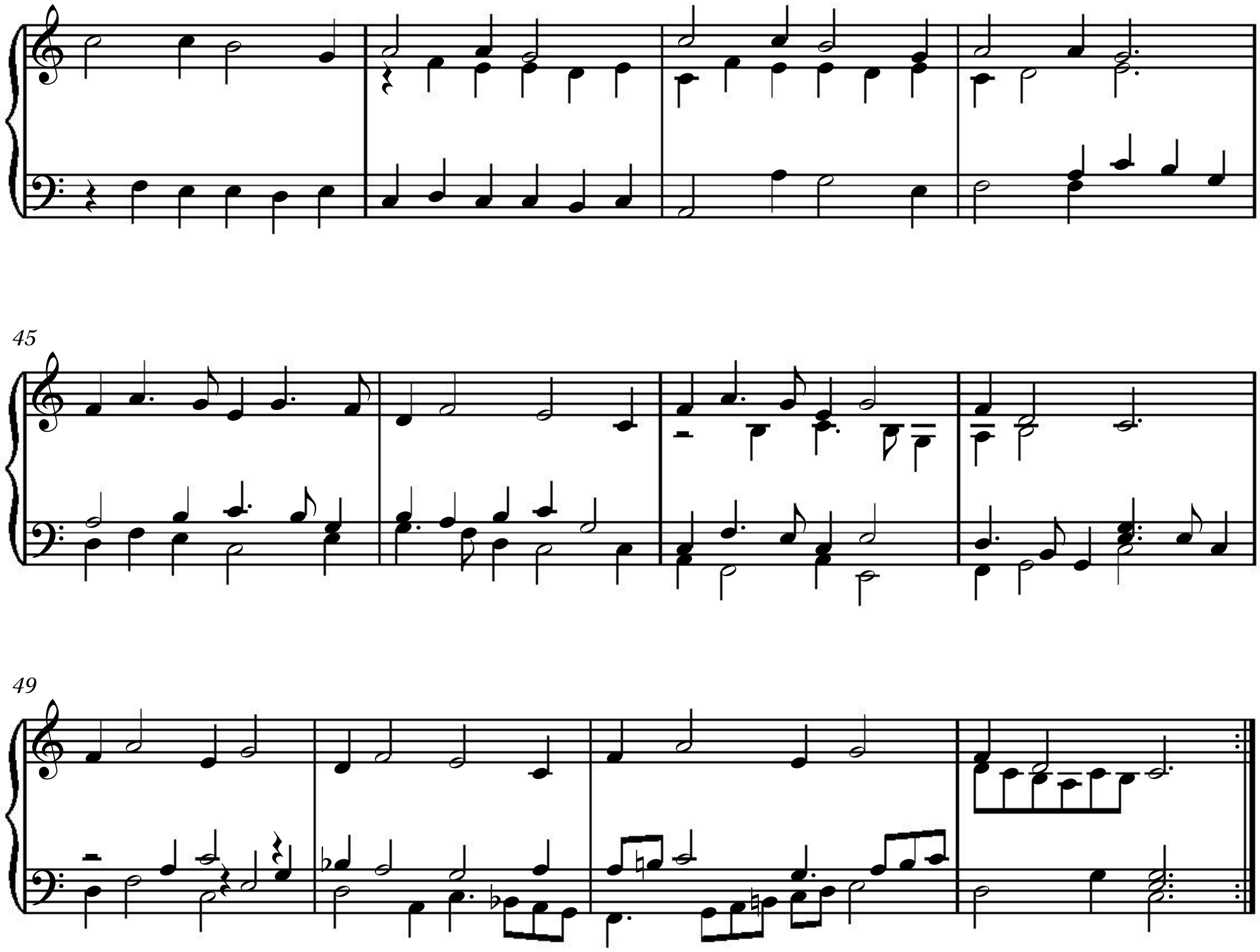
William Byrd



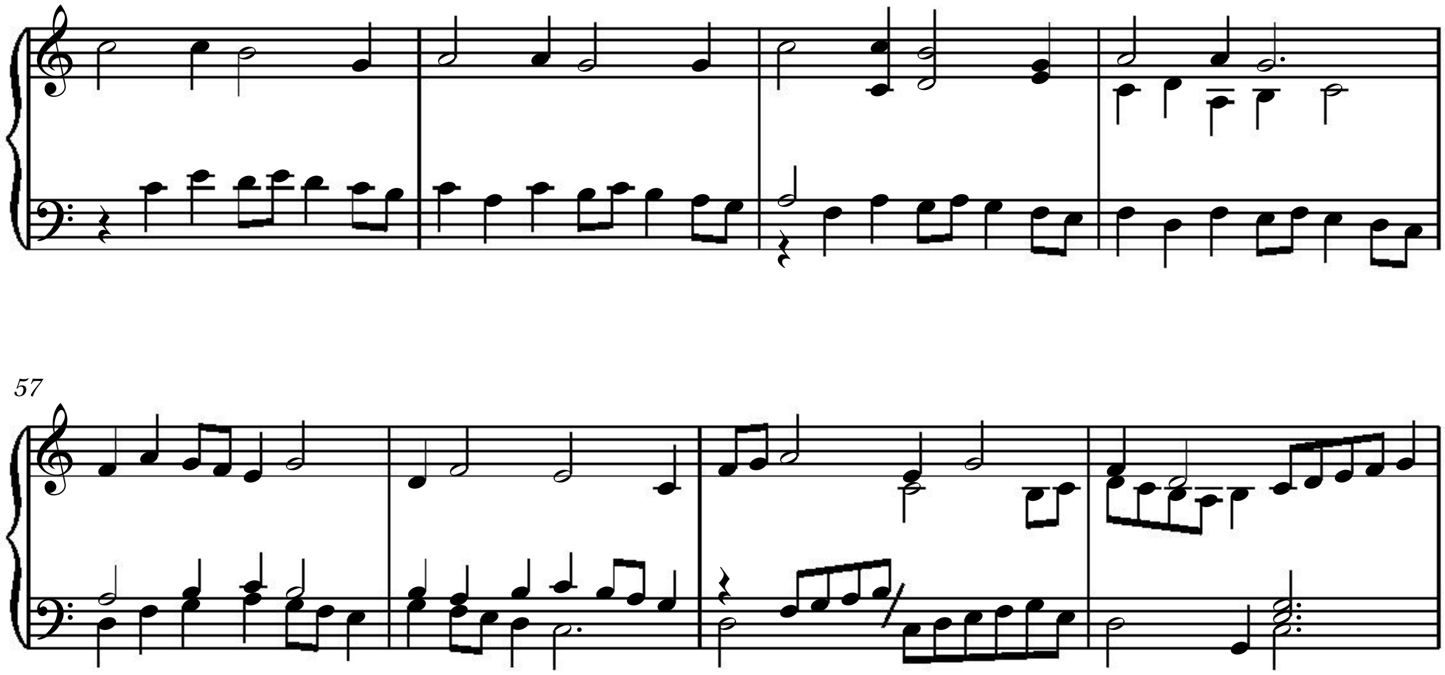
tr
7
tr
12
tr
tr
17
1.
tr
tr

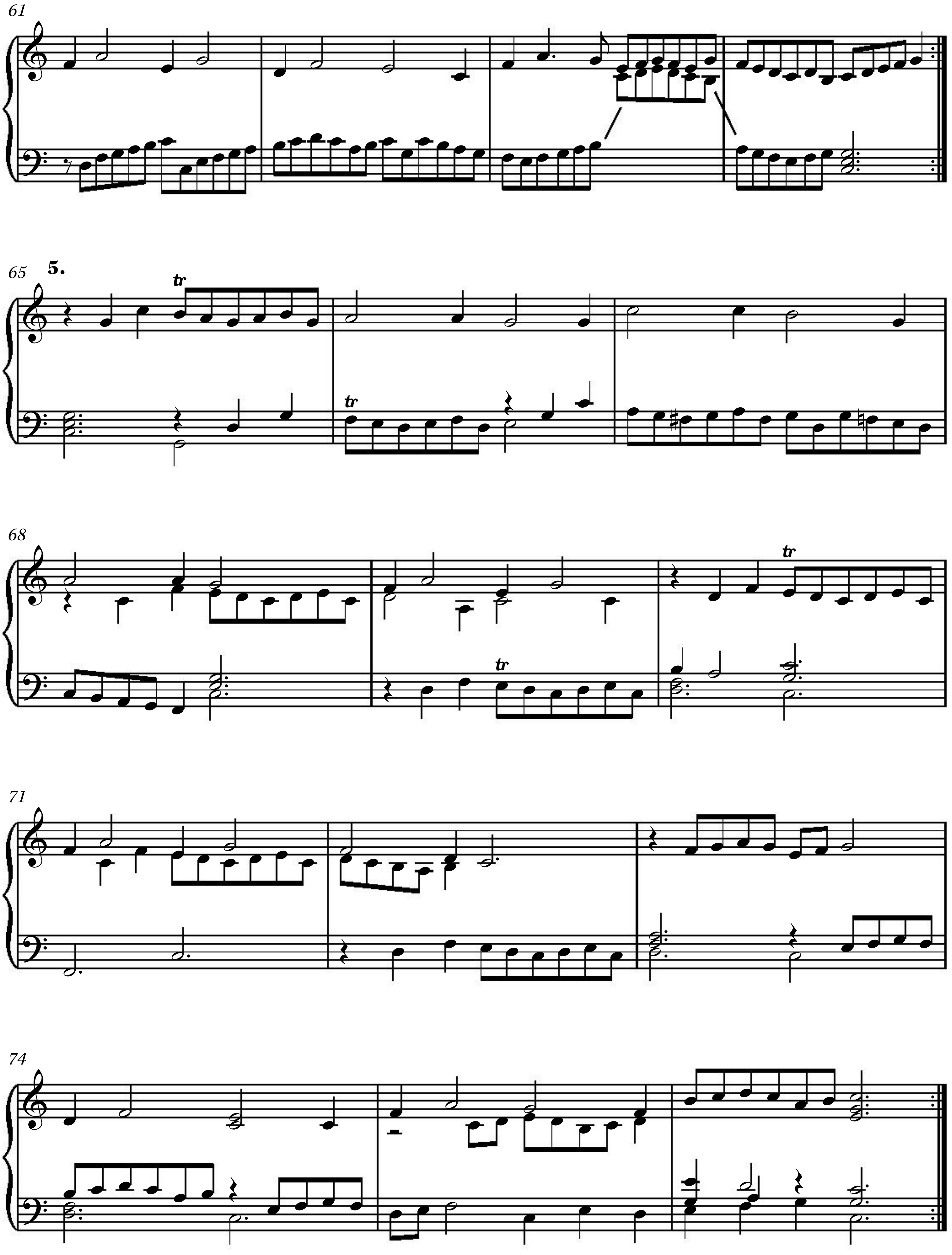

22
tr
26
tr
29
2.
tr
33
tr
37
tr

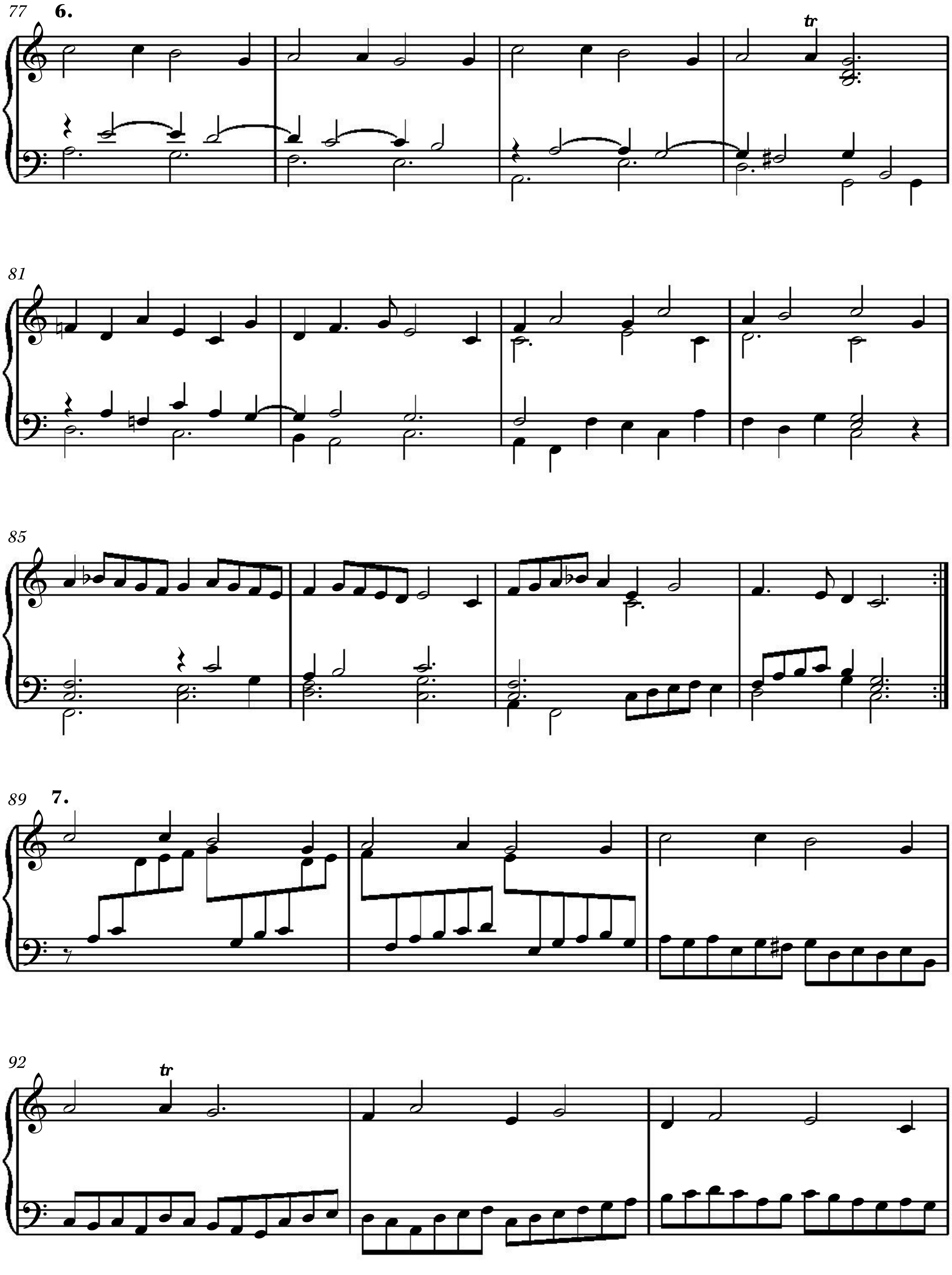
**3.**

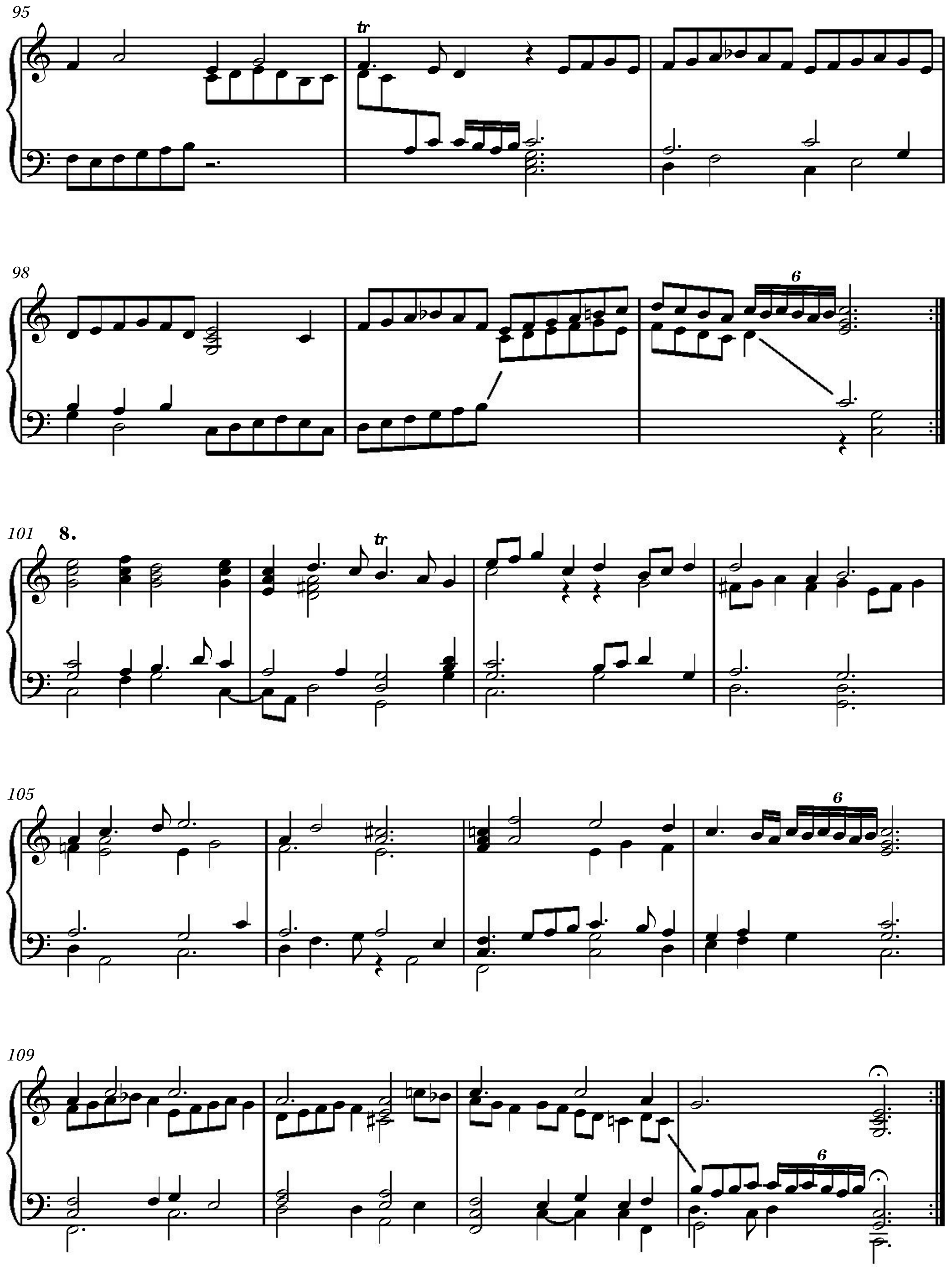


**4.**




61
65
5.
tr
tr
68
tr
tr
71
74


77
6.
tr
81
85
89
7.
92
tr


95
tr
98
6
101
8.
tr
105
6
109
6

# Reigniting the flame

JOHN McMUNN

Robert Levin and the Academy of Ancient Music resume their period-instrument cycle of Mozart's piano concertos after a gap of more than two decades. **Colin Clarke** drops in

The release of Mozart's Piano Concertos K467 (No 21) and K491 (No 24) by Robert Levin with the Academy of Ancient Music and Richard Egarr, issued last month, is surely a collector's dream. Levin began this project in 1993 with the much-missed Christopher Hogwood, on the L'Oiseau-Lyre imprint, beginning with the Concertos K414 and K271 (released in 1994). In total eight discs were issued, delivering 17 of the concertos; the project was cancelled in 2001. To celebrate the Academy of Ancient Music's 50th anniversary season, the project will finally – some two decades later – be brought to completion (and will include the world premiere of Mozart's recently unearthed first-ever concerto movement, written at the tender age of eight). Richard Egarr features only on the first and last releases of this final tranche of albums, as he had to withdraw; Ya-Fei Chuang (Levin's wife) stepped in to play in the two- and three-piano concertos, with Laurence Cummings also playing in the three-piano concerto, where he directs from the keyboard. Cummings also conducts the two-piano concertos from the podium, and in the remaining works the direction is split between Cummings and Bojan Čičić.

Over six sets of recording sessions (one of which, in St John's Smith Square in London, I was able to attend), Levin will complete the cycle, making it the first truly complete recording of Mozart's works for keyboard and orchestra. The final album is due for issue in June 2024.

Levin refers to the resumption of this cycle as 'somewhat miraculous': it only really came into view when John McMunn arrived as CEO of the AAM, and ongoing fundraising has been key. 'It didn't seem that I could ever hope the remaining five discs would take place,' Levin says; yet they have. As he explains, he thinks the older recordings have 'weathered rather well', and as in the earlier recordings, Levin not only improvises his cadenzas but also elaborates lines and plays during orchestral expositions, always characterfully. 'It was quite an initiative to do this, and when I suggested that I wanted to improvise cadenzas, ornamentation and so on, that meant that this went beyond using period instruments to doing things which really evoked a bygone era.'

This brings up the question of Mozart's notation: 'I think it's important to understand that Mozart wrote most of the concertos for himself … he could trust his own memory and he didn't have to write down every single semiquaver. When he wrote concertos for other people, often the notation was more

CLIVE BARDA

explicit.' Levin also references the so-called 'white passages', where the composer writes the bottom note and the top note of an arpeggio that is intended to be filled in with semiquavers. Some performers, especially in the earlier part of the 20th century, played them as written, resulting in a sort of bare-bones Mozart.

Musicology is different now from 20 years ago, although those earlier recordings were born of cutting-edge research. Back then they entrusted Cliff Eisen, the Canadian musicologist whose speciality is Mozart, not only to write the booklet notes but to work together with Levin to incorporate the most recent findings. This meant going back to the manuscripts, while Eisen also went through the original performance parts in Salzburg (which show what the composer actually played). 'When the New Mozart Edition was published, they thought the most important thing was the autograph because there it is, the holy grail in Mozart's handwriting. But the fact is that whether it's an opera or a concerto or a symphony, the [performance] parts tell you the truth about what was actually heard, and sometimes the parts diverge from the original manuscript readings, and one has to decide what to do about that.'

Another characteristic of these performances that may cause some surprise is Levin's use of rubato, which sounds natural and stylish. He quotes one of Mozart's letters in which the composer states he played the left hand strictly and was freer with the right. This fits in well with the fact that Levin also brings a sense of operatic drama to his performances: as he puts it, 'the sense of character is so important in the Mozart piano concertos, which are sort of operas with a single character', adding that 'listening to the wind play, they are so essential to the creation of the sense of dialogue, and exchange, and narrative'.

AAM
1781
MOZART
PIANO CONCERTOS
K467 | K491
Academy of Ancient Music
Robert Levin | Richard Egarr

One difference in the two sets of recordings is that the earlier ones came after tours of public performances. 'There was a great deal of pressure that exceeded that of prior recordings,' recalls Levin. 'It has made for greater adventure, for sure.' Certainly the sense of spontaneity I experienced at the session comes through clearly on the recording – the sense of freedom compared to Mozart's disciplined notation in the finale of K491 is utterly remarkable, for example, while the improvised cadenzas are revelatory.

Levin uses a variety of instruments across his cycle. He used a harpsichord for the first four so-called 'pasticcio' concertos (and will use an organ in Dulwich for the original version of K175); for the new release (Concertos Nos 21 and 24), Levin plays a Chris Maene replica of a 1795 Anton Walter fortepiano (Vallotti temperament; the pitch was A=430Hz) that sounds beautifully crisp and bright. Elsewhere, he says, they used other instruments – a Paul McNulty Stein-like instrument, for example. As he puts it: 'I wanted to present a kind of culture of pianos, their timbres, their characters.' These recordings will also present the concert aria *Ch'io mi scordi di te*, K505, which Mozart wrote for Nancy Storace and himself, a glorious piece recorded here with soprano Louise Alder; and two versions of K242, the version for three harpsichords and that for two pianos. 'People will have a lot to discover about these pieces, I think,' muses Levin, and I can but concur. The very final volume will contain the Concertos Nos 25 and 27 along with that concert aria.

These performances are a breath of fresh air – and the resumption of the concerto cycle is a clear cause for celebration. The combination of scholarship and joy in performance, writ large by Levin's superb improvisations, is in itself a modern-day miracle. **IP**

# Critics' choice

BY BRYCE MORRISON

NAXOS
RACHMANINOV
Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 4
Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini
Boris Giltburg
Brussels Philharmonic · Vassily Sinaisky

**Rachmaninov** Piano Concertos Nos 1 and 4; Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini
**Boris Giltburg** *pf*
Brussels Philharmonic / Vassily Sinaisky
*Naxos 8 574528*

With this issue Boris Giltburg completes his cycle of Rachmaninov's works for piano and orchestra, complementing his previous albums of virtually the complete solo music. Once more the playing is of a thrilling immediacy and charisma. Hardly a pianist for vague approximations, he lets you hear every one of Rachmaninov's teeming notes, of music once aptly described as 'raising virtuoso pianism to heights undreamed of even by Liszt'. In contrast to such bright-eyed bravura and command, Giltburg is hauntingly engaging in the First Concerto's central melancholic dream world and he is ideally suited to the once heavily maligned but now favoured Fourth Concerto. He is also fleet and glittering in the 'Paganini' Rhapsody (for him the musical equivalent of a white-knuckle ride); and if there are other recordings of a more subtle engagement – Richter in the First Concerto, Michelangeli in the Fourth, to take two key examples – you can't help being carried away by Giltburg's energy and commitment. He would be the first to agree with the poet Blake that 'exuberance is beauty' while 'prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by incapacity.'

Deutsche Grammophon
SEONG-JIN CHO
THE HANDEL PROJECT
Handel: 3 Suites · Brahms: Handel Variations

**'The Handel Project'**
**Brahms** 'Handel' Variations
**Handel** Three Suites
**Seong-Jin Cho** *pf*
*DG 486 3018*

Seong-Jin Cho's 'The Handel Project' celebrates an unjustly neglected part of the keyboard repertoire. Selecting three of Handel's 16 suites his performances are of a brilliance and empathy that challenge such indifference. At times his spare pedalling and articulacy

## ALBUM OF THE MONTH

*Imaginative freedom: Benjamin Grosvenor*

ANDREJ GRILC

DECCA
BENJAMIN GROSVENOR
SCHUMANN & BRAHMS

**Schumann** Kreisleriana and other works
**Brahms** Intermezzos, Op 117
**Benjamin Grosvenor** *pf*
*Decca 485 3945*

'Fantasy, Ecstasy, Despair' – for once the advertising blurb hits the spot, and never more so than in Benjamin Grosvenor's wondrous response to Schumann. Rarely have the composer's two beloved fictions – Florestan, the man of action, and Eusebius, the man of dreams – been more vividly contrasted and characterised. He takes everything, every kaleidoscopic change of mood and direction, of tears and laughter, to the very edge. Few pianists would dare such imaginative freedom, and even when compared with front runners such as Horowitz and Argerich in *Kreisleriana* remind me of Glenn Gould, though he is entirely without Gould's infamous idiosyncrasy. Such clarity makes a convincing case for performance on a modern instrument of music originally conceived for the harpsichord. But if characterisation is less marked or vivid than on the celebrated recording on Warner Classics where Richter and Gavrilov share the honours, Cho's rhythmic resilience and brio are exhilarating attributes. While Cho is musically as well as technically immersive in Handel, he is less so in Brahms, where he fails to offer a necessarily richer sonority, a range and grandeur inseparable from this music's opulence. In comparison, Katchen's more inclusive mastery and Perahia's inward-looking poetry offer more compelling experiences, though Cho's imaginative return to Handel, through the romantic haze cast by Kempff in his arrangement of the G minor Minuet, shows a higher degree of warmth and engagement. DG's sound is exemplary, while the accompanying notes include Cho's comments that Handel's richly embellished suites come 'directly from the heart', and – more provocatively – that Brahms's 'Handel' Variations are 'the best variations that have ever been written'.

Grosvenor's performance leaves an unforgettable imprint. How he leaves you lost in wonder as he makes the wild and impulsive opening dissolve into silvery introspection. Again, he makes you hold your breath at the stillness he conjures in the concluding *Adagio* of the second intermezzo (the one that caused Clara such concern, fearing that such audacity would meet with incomprehension). His clarity in the fearsomely demanding central part of section 7 is something to marvel at. Elsewhere, Grosvenor makes Clara's love of the second of the three Romances ('I know of nothing more tender') entirely understandable. Clara's own set of Variations shows her to be no mere shadow of her husband but a composer as well as a pianist of high distinction. This should be in the repertoire of every Romantically inclined pianist. Grosvenor's own arrangement of 'Abendlied' (from Schumann's piano duets 'für kleine und grosse Kinder', Op 85) and the first of Brahms's Op 117 Intermezzos provide a perfect contrasting calm, the Brahms coming like some serene benediction. But in the principal offering Grosvenor makes you fall in love with Schumann, the ultimate Romantic genius, all over again.

hyperion
SCHUBERT
Piano Sonata in A minor D537
Piano Sonata in A major D959
GARRICK OHLSSON

**Schubert** Piano Sonatas D537 and D959
**Garrick Ohlsson** *pf*
*Hyperion CDA68398*

Garrick Ohlsson's triumph in the 1970 Chopin Competition has resonated down the years, with sizeable recording projects to his credit (the complete Beethoven sonatas, a complete Chopin cycle, etc) as varied as they are comprehensive. And here he turns to Schubert in performances both personal and honest. After Eric Lu's recent overworked Schubert it is refreshing to note such powerful and direct musicianship, without fuss or impediment. He chooses the least ambitious of the three A minor sonatas, finely aware of its boldly experimental character, and in the great A major Sonata he brings an unwavering weight and authority to the agonised outburst at the heart of the *Andantino* and a touch of wistfulness to the Scherzo. Ohlsson's is a clear-sighted alternative to, say, Kempff's subtle indirection or Volodos's expressive insight (raising the question, can Schubert be made too beautiful?). Hyperion's sound is immaculate.

FRANZ LISZT
La Leggierezza
Yang Yang Cai piano

**Liszt** 'La leggierezza'
**Yang Yang Cai** *pf*
*Challenge Classics CC72928*

Yang Yang Cai is a Chinese-Dutch pianist whose enterprising Liszt recital at once attracts attention. This ranges from the salon charms of the *Valse-Impromptu* through the three *Apparitions* (where at the age of 22 Liszt already foreshadows his final dark-hued years), the three *Études de concert*, the formidable étude 'Chasse-neige' and finally Liszt's transcription of Schubert's 'Du bist die Ruh'. Characterful if heavy-handed in the *Valse-Impromptu* and also making heavy weather of the central octaves in the second of the 'Paganini' Études, Cai scores her greatest success in the *Apparitions*. She is heartfelt and intense in the obsessive wheeling around a single idea in 'Il lamento', the first and most neglected of the three *Études de concert*, and if others have been more delectably light-fingered in 'La leggierezza' (cruelly, Moiseiwitsch comes to mind), she is never less than musicianly, not least in the glamorous ebb and flow of 'Un sospiro'. She is equally convincing in the bleak snowscape of 'Chasse-neige' and ends by reminding you that for Liszt Schubert was 'the most poetic of all composers.'

YUJA WANG
THE AMERICAN PROJECT
ABRAMS | TILSON THOMAS
LOUISVILLE ORCHESTRA | ABRAMS

**'The American Project'**
**Abrams** Piano Concerto
**Tilson Thomas** You Come Here Often?
**Yuja Wang** *pf*
Louisville Orchestra / Teddy Abrams
*DG 486 4478*

Teddy Abrams's Piano Concerto is a riotous spree, an onslaught on the stuffiness and snobbery that hang like a cloud over so-called 'classical' or 'serious' music. Composed specifically for Yuja Wang, a pianist he is happy to call 'one of the greatest alive, and of all time,' it celebrates the 'interconnectedness' of American culture, a place where Copland, Gershwin and Bolcom rub shoulders with Gospel and Latin America. But unlike Bolcom's Piano Concerto, which the composer described as 'one of the bitterest pieces I have yet written', Abrams's Concerto is both joyous and a perfect gift for a pianist of prodigious talent and reflex, who revels in no fewer than four cadenzas to display her pianistic aplomb. Michael Tilson Thomas's *You Come Here Often?*, again specially composed for Yuja Wang, provides her with a mischievous and scintillating encore (although it is curiously placed first on the album). DG's presentation is lavish and includes several photos of the pianist, her dress sense as eye-catching and idiosyncratic as ever. **IP**

## SOLO REPERTOIRE

Rafał Blechacz
Chopin

**Chopin** Piano Sonatas Nos 2 and 3; Nocturne Op 48 No 2; Barcarolle
**Rafał Blechacz** *pf*
*DG 486 3438*

With this richly inclusive programme Rafał Blechacz offers performances that will be welcomed by those who like their Chopin with less heat. Admirably true to the score, he is hardly the sort of pianist who exalts in his own glory at the expense of the composer's. Yet his 'sweet reasonableness' runs counter to Chopin's volatility, to his always uncertain temper.

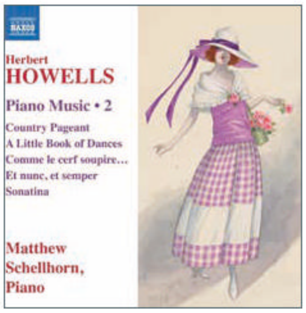
This is particularly true of his way with the B flat minor Sonata, where Chopin is at his most audacious. Unlike, say, Cortot or Samson François (to name but two), Blechacz remains unruffled in the face of even the most extreme emotional storms, making you wonder what all the fuss was about (for Schumann, Chopin had bound 'four of his maddest children under the same roof', while Mendelssohn detested the finale – 'as music I abhor it'). The Scherzo lacks a demonic drive while the finale sounds more literal than eerie, its concluding outburst more apologetic than defiant.

Again, the F sharp minor Nocturne is given with more common sense than fantasy and in the B minor Sonata constraint once again plays against excitement. Blechacz never seems to fully let go, and I found myself recalling recordings of a stronger profile, of those by Argerich (her temperamental force and liquid-fire virtuosity) as well as Cortot and François.

BRYCE MORRISON

*Unruffled: Rafał Blechacz*

CHRISTOPH KÖSTLIN



**Howells** Piano Music, Volume 2
**Matthew Schellhorn** *pf*
*Naxos 8 571383*

Matthew Schellhorn's first volume of the piano music of Howells was a great success, taking in a span of 60 years of the composer's output. The repertoire on Volume 2 is similarly wide-ranging, from some charming juvenilia through modal dances to the Sonatina of 1971.

The programme is bookended by late-style works. *Comme le cerf soupire …* (1963) is based on an old French chanson and is sparse and lachrymose. The final piece is the Sonatina in Schellhorn's own edition, piquant and pungent (using a scale derived from Vaughan Williams's Fourth Symphony). The elusive slow movement is cast in one of Howells's favourite forms, the sarabande, before the finale offers an expansion of the *Toccatina* found on Volume 1.

Schellhorn treats the early pieces with equal focus. *The Arab's Song* is certainly pastiche but is also gentle; the impeccably English *To a Wild Flower*, the Brahmsian *Romance* and the *Melody* with its hints of Grieg are pure delight – these works all composed in the composer's teens. Inspiration came in various forms for Howells: *The Chosen Tune* (the only piece not a premiere recording) is a tender work referring to a town in Gloucestershire and the home of Howells's fiancée.

Perhaps most remarkable is *Et nunc, et semper (Quasi Menuetto)* (1967), which seems to elude classification, its enigma enhanced by remarkably haunting harmonies. Schellhorn is fully attuned to this music and is an ideal champion. Recommended.

COLIN CLARKE

Rued Langgaard Piano Works Vol. 4 Berit Johansen Tange

**Langgaard** Piano Music, Volume 4
**Berit Johansen Tange** *pf*
*Dacapo 6 220662*

Danish composer Rued Langgaard (1893-1952) enjoyed writing for the piano, penning over 50 works spanning his development as a composer. His piano music is served here by the perfect interpreter, Berit Johansen Tange, who as co-editor of Langgaard's complete works for piano has worked intensively with the composer's music.

This fourth volume of Tange's survey of Langgaard's piano music begins with the 1913 *Flower Vignettes*. There is no doubting a Schumann-in-miniature-mode here; flowers were a great interest of Langgaard's and that affection is writ large, whether in the capricious final 'Daisy' (delivered with great finger strength) or the expressive 'Forget-me-not'. The album is bookended by sets of flower vignettes: the gorgeous closing set (1951) was Langgaard's last significant work.

The Second Piano Sonata (1934-41/1945), subtitled 'Ex est' ('It is over'), includes in its ruminations on a failed love affair a quote from Langgaard's song 'Vergeblich' ('In Vain', 1913). Interestingly, the second movement seems to enjoy a kinship with Brahms's Op 118 No 1 (and Brahms's shadow reappears in the finale), while later grotesqueries suggest an affinity with Langgaard's opera *Antikrist*. The Sonata is magnificent, with the spiritual ascent of the hymnic *Lento anagogico* (delivered with beautiful tone by Tange) at its core.

Of the shorter pieces, *Flammekamrene* ('Chambers of Flames', 1930-37) is fascinating, the title a reference to Copenhagen's flickering gaslights in Langgaard's childhood; it also references the soul-burning chambers of *Antikrist*. Some of *Flammekamrene* recalls the mysticism of Scriabin, although this virtuoso piece also has Lisztian elements. Superbly recorded.

**COLIN CLARKE**

SOMM RECORDINGS
MOZART
Piano Sonatas
Volume 6
Peter Donohoe
piano

**Mozart** Piano Sonatas, Volume 6
Piano Sonatas K282, K457, K545;
Fantasia K475
**Peter Donohoe** *pf*
*Somm SOMMCD0660*

This programme is a delightful introduction to Mozart's mature piano music, with the early E flat major Sonata, K282, of 1774 adding extra context. Donohoe may strike some as too robust for this repertoire, perhaps being more at home in Beethoven, Busoni or assorted Russians, but his Mozartian credentials and sensibilities are of a high order. He is spaciously recorded (at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire), beautifully engineered by Paul Arden-Taylor as with previous volumes.

I do have a minor cavil with this account of the famous opening *Allegro* of the C major Sonata, K545. Unlike, say, Christian Blackshaw in his marvellous Wigmore Hall Live series, or fortepianist Kristian Bezuidenhout (Harmonia Mundi), Donohoe unaccountably dispenses with the second repeat—unwisely, in my view, as it unbalances the movement's structure. (He observes the exposition repeat.) In the central *Andante*, Donohoe's pace is happily brisker than from Blackshaw, though he is less alive to the subtle contrasts in the music's flow. There is little to choose in the brief finale, although Blackshaw's superb instrument and exquisite recording make him my preferred choice.

Donohoe takes the opening *Adagio* of K282 at a not unreasonably sturdy pace where others, Blackshaw included, adopt a slower tempo. Donohoe, like Bezuidenhout, prevents the music from dragging or becoming Beethovenian in scale (Ludwig was just four years old when this sonata was written). I like Donohoe's up-tempo manner throughout, and much the same applies to the dark, passionate Fantasia, K475, given a powerful reading where tempos are never allowed to become flaccid. The C minor Sonata, K457, embodies all the strengths of Donohoe's no-nonsense approach and if, like me, you like your Mozart 'straight', as it were, then you'll find much to enjoy. Some may crave the greater interpretative nuance of Blackshaw or Uchida, but I would be surprised if many feel short-changed by Donohoe.

**GUY RICKARDS**

Nicolaou Etudes &
Frames Tamara
Stefanovich

**Nicolaou** Études & Frames
**Tamara Stefanovich,**
**Pierre-Laurent Aimard** *pfs*
*Pentatone PTC5187 041*

The Cypriot composer Vassos Nicolaou studied in Cologne, Frankfurt and Paris, with York Höller, Beat Furrer and others; he has worked with Ensemble Modern and the London Sinfonietta. His *Études* (2008-16) explore complex rhythms, high velocities and multi-layered sound, creating patterns of resonance through the sustain pedal.

For Stefanovich, who has premiered many of them, the set recalls Ligeti's *Études*, classics of the post-war piano repertoire. The rapid-fire No 1, 'Anodos', creates the illusion of polyphony from a single line – certainly reminiscent of Ligeti. The equally meteoric No 5, 'Mirrors/Interventions', is also Ligeti-inspired, while 'Monologos' (No 2) recalls Messiaenic birdsong. The furiously clangorous opening of 'Teso' (No 13) is freighted with resonance patterns, which are juxtaposed with a tenderly lyrical efflorescence. For the 10-minute *Frames* for piano four hands, Stefanovich is joined by Pierre-Laurent Aimard in an orchestral-sounding expansion of the *Études*' sound world.

At first this album was a challenging listen. But the music's compelling conception gradually became clear. Stefanovich is right: Nicolaou follows Ligeti in reconstructing 19th-century keyboard virtuosity, and his pieces embrace metric irregularity and illusion, creating remarkable new sonorities. If these *Études* are inspired by Ligeti, in my book that's not a criticism. Ligeti was a genius, and only an artist of the greatest talent could draw from him as convincingly as Nicolaou does. The result is a richly rewarding album.

**ANDY HAMILTON**

Schumann
FOR CLARA
audite
Jimin Oh-Havenith

**Schumann** 'For Clara'
Piano Sonata No 1; Fantasie, Op 17
**Jimin Oh-Havenith** *pf*
*Audite AUDITE20 050*

Jimin Oh-Havenith's account of Schumann's First Piano Sonata is the best performance here. The first movement is very well sculpted, with textures just right for Schumann, although one does rather miss Pollini's sense of urgency (DG). The intimacy of the second-movement Aria is palpable – phrases are beautifully shaped, and Oh-Havenith is unafraid to lay Schumann's sparse textures bare. Sadly, the Scherzo is more pedestrian, with none of the rhythmic bounce of Pollini, although she does find some grandeur in the finale.

The recording is on the shallow side, which rather impacts upon both pieces: there is little depth to the bass at the opening of the C major *Fantasie*, despite the overall somewhat boomy sound, which might not do justice to Oh-Havenith or her Bösendorfer. There are risks in taking some passages so slowly, but it works thanks to Oh-Havenith's fine legato. The *Fantasie*'s second movement is grand and represents the high point of this interpretation despite a slightly cautious coda, while the finale has a nice sense of building momentum and twilit grace. Nevertheless, there is a hugely crowded field for the *Fantasie*, and Oh-Havenith cannot compete with the likes of Uchida, Pollini, Hamelin or, from an earlier era, Backhaus.

COLIN CLARKE

L.V. BEETHOVEN
BÉLA BARTÓK
PANCHO VLADIGEROV
ALEXANDER VLADIGEROV
ECLECTIC SOUNDS
ALEXANDER TCHOBANOV PIANO
NAVONA

***'Eclectic Sounds'***
Works by Beethoven, Bartók, Pancho Vladigerov and Alexander Vladigerov
**Alexander Tchobanov** *pf*
*Navona NV6460*

Unexpected juxtapositions connected by a certain precision of expression link the four works on this stimulating album from Alexander Tchobanov. His account of Beethoven's E major Sonata, Op 109, is carefully considered, although perhaps not the equal of Queffélec's recent recording (Mirare, reviewed last issue). Tchobanov has a keen ear for texture and is as accomplished with the sustaining pedal as he is with his fingers.

Tchobanov's sense of rhythm is a vital part of the reading of Op 109, as it is in Bartók's Piano Sonata. Here we have the primal edge of Bartók's writing coupled with the spirit of dance. He captures the dark tollings of the second movement perfectly, while the active dance rhythms of the finale link superbly with the 'Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm' from *Mikrokosmos*, the finest performance on the album.

The Vladigerovs, Pancho and Alexander, are father and son, and their music seems a natural progression from Bartók's dances. Pancho's Prelude, Op 15 No 1 (1922), sounds like a Bulgarian Rachmaninov; Tchobanov's projection of the music's impetuosity is terrifically exciting. Alexander Vladigerov's *Variations on a Bulgarian Folk Song*, Op 2 (1954), are fearsomely difficult, and Tchobanov captures the risk-taking of a live performance with the precision of the studio.

COLIN CLARKE

MOZART
BEETHOVEN
MENDELSSOHN
BRAHMS
VARIATIONS
SARAH BETH BRIGGS
PIANO

***'Variations'***
Works by Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Brahms
**Sarah Beth Briggs** *pf*
*Avie AV2569*

For many, the opening item in this intriguing collection from Sarah Beth Briggs – Mozart's *Variations on a Minuet by Jean-Pierre Duport* (1789) – will be the main novelty. Written (as Daniel Jaffé notes in the booklet) 'to flatter a potential patron' – Prussia's King Friedrich Wilhelm II – by featuring a charming theme by the King's chamber music director (Duport, 1741-1818, later the dedicatee of Beethoven's Op 5 cello sonatas), Mozart's variations may flatter Duport's theme but do not overwhelm it. Their freely flowing invention is nicely rendered by Briggs as a satisfying musical whole rather than the exercise in rapid nimbleness of rival recordings.

Both Beethoven sets are often overlooked, I think largely because of their brevity. Op 34 (1802) is a great example of the Apollonian strand in his compositional make-up, no less groundbreaking for its tonal scheme, shifting downwards in thirds variation by variation. Briggs lets the music speak for itself, as in *God Save the King* (1803). Competition is notably fiercer here, however, with among others Brendel, Brautigam and Hewitt among the options where the listener might feel better served.

Briggs does a nice job of pacing Mendelssohn's *Variations sérieuses* (1841), peaking in the 10th and 13th variations. If not a market leader, this is a fine rendition. In Brahms's *Schumann* Variations, Briggs's main recent rivals on record are Barry Douglas (Chandos) and Jonathan Plowright (BIS). While Briggs doesn't match the latter's irresistible fluidity in, for example, the swift fifth and sixth variations or the soft *Andante (non troppo lento)* pulse of the eighth, her deliberation can pay dividends, as in the ninth and tenth variations and glacial final *Adagio*. A pupil of the great Denis Matthews, Briggs's playing may divide opinion but I love it. While I might wish for a touch more impulsion here and there, this is a fluently played programme casting a beguiling light on music both familiar and less so.

GUY RICKARDS

## TWO PIANOS

onyx
RACHMANINOV
Symphonic Dances, Op.45
YORK BOWEN
Theme & Variations, Op.139
MEDTNER
Two pieces, Op.58
Joseph Moog
Kai Adomeit

**Rachmaninov** Symphonic Dances
**Bowen** Theme and Variations, Op 129
**Medtner** Two Pieces, Op 58
**Joseph Moog, Kai Adomeit** *pfs*
*Onyx ONYX4229*

Joseph Moog and Kai Adomeit's programme looks at Russia through differing lenses, some direct, some indirect. Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances* could hardly be more indelibly Russian, their idiom a taut and dark alternative to the earlier luxuriance of the two suites for two pianos. Medtner proudly maintained his Russian roots while living most of his life in England, while York Bowen's Variations show a distinctive Russian influence (though less so than in many of his other keyboard works).

This intriguing recital is performed with overall mastery, but Moog and Adomeit are much less adept at capturing the bitterness and disillusion that hangs over the Rachmaninov than we hear from Martha Argerich and Nicolas Economou (DG), the fear of changing times exemplified in much of Prokofiev's early work. By comparison Moog and Adomeit are solid and dependable rather than enlightening. They are at their most impressive in Medtner's 'Round Dance' (magically recorded by the composer and Moiseiwitsch) and 'Knight Errant', cutting through the thickets of notes while never quite erasing the sense of a composer who continued speaking when he had too little to say.

BRYCE MORRISON

## PIANO CONCERTOS

UR
ASHKENAZY
GRIEG
CHOPIN
RACHMANINOV
PROKOFIEV
PIANO CONCERTOS LIVE

***'Piano Concertos Live'***
Works by Grieg, Chopin, Rachmaninov and Prokofiev
**Vladimir Ashkenazy** *pf*
*Urania WS121407*

This two-disc album contains performances dating from 1960 to 1970, a time when Ashkenazy's early silken facility transformed, though not without initial difficulty, into a formidable authority expressed in a weighty, full-blooded sonority. 'Live' with a vengeance, the playing surges with adrenalin. In Rachmaninov's Third and Prokofiev's Second Concertos an enduring love of Russian music is evident in Ashkenazy's bold risk-taking and engulfing emotion, qualities hard to imagine in the recording studio. I first heard the Prokofiev in concert many years ago, again from Ashkenazy, and was left winded by the impact of this dark and malignant masterpiece, Russian to the very core, and by the propulsion and sheer physicality and athleticism of Ashkenazy's playing. In the massive first-movement development/cadenza it was like being hit in the solar plexus. And yet there was such rhetorical grandeur; how wonderful to relive this experience. The same applies to the Rachmaninov, played uncut and including the alternative, bigger cadenza (an unusual choice at the time). Today Rachmaninov's Third Concerto is in the repertoire of many teenage pianists, but listening to Ashkenazy in such heightened form they may well feel mistaken in their assumption that they have the full measure of this peak of the Romantic concerto repertoire. The performance ends in a storm of applause, making you forget a surprisingly indifferent partnership by the Los Angeles Philharmonic under William Steinberg.

On the first disc you will hear the Grieg Concerto. Ashkenazy never made a commercial recording of this work so it is a special privilege to hear it played here, not only with masterly brilliance but with a poetic empathy suggesting a deep affection for Grieg's beloved Norway. Nothing is taken for granted and the performance ends in a blaze of national pride. Ashkenazy made me fall in love all over again with this evergreen concerto.

In Chopin's Second Concerto the blend of musical and technical mastery is, again, formidable and unfaltering, even when there is a touch of severity or an impatience with Chopin's early charm and scintillation. But overall, these recordings should be in the collection of any lover of great piano-playing. The recordings are understandably varied, but nothing can dim the sense of a master pianist rejoicing in powers known to very few.

BRYCE MORRISON

## JAZZ

DAVE BRUBECK QUARTET
DEBUT IN THE NETHERLANDS 1958
THE LOST RECORDINGS
Dave Brubeck

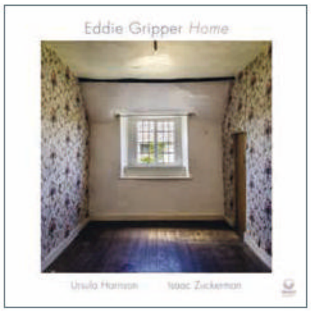
***'Debut in The Netherlands 1958'***
**Dave Brubeck Quartet**
**Dave Brubeck** *pf* **Paul Desmond** *alto sax*
**Eugene Wright** *bass* **Joe Morello** *drums*
*The Lost Recordings TLR2204043*

Sponsored by the US State Department, Dave Brubeck's Quartet, including new members Joe Morello (drums) and Eugene Wright (bass), toured Europe from early 1958. This became the Quartet's classic line-up, which went on to record *Time Out* and 'Take Five'. The Netherlands leg of the tour began with this concert at Amsterdam's Concertgebouw.

They opened with 'Two-Part Contention', a Baroque invention as favoured by cool jazz of the era, followed by 'Someday My Prince Will Come'. 'These Foolish Things' gets one of the Quartet's finest interpretations of this classic song, with an intensely thematic improvisation by Brubeck; this is followed by a plangent version of 'One Moment Worth Years'. The concert ends with Brubeck's classic composition 'The Duke' and Billy Strayhorn's 'Take the "A" Train' – though the tape ran out before it ended.

There are familiar delights here: Brubeck's block-chord improvisation on 'Two-Part Contention' and the theme-arrangement of 'These Foolish Things', similar to that on Brubeck and Desmond's final recording, the beautiful *1975: The Duets*. But this is similarity within difference – these musicians subscribe to an aesthetics of imperfection, which stresses spontaneity and contingency. This excellently recorded discovery is a cornucopia of delights.

ANDY HAMILTON



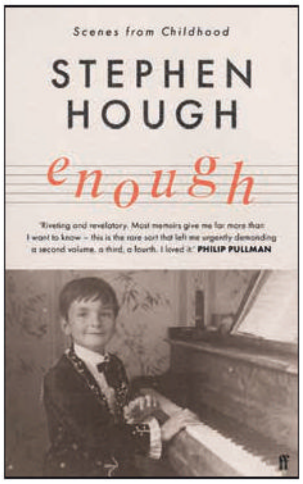
**Eddie Gripper** 'Home'
**Eddie Gripper** *pf* **Ursula Harrison** *bass*
**Isaac Zuckerman** *drums*
*Ubuntu UBU133*

*Home* is the debut album by British pianist and composer Eddie Gripper, featuring his trio of Ursula Harrison (bass) and Isaac Zuckerman (drums). The seven tracks offer intriguing grooves and harmonies that show a sophisticated understanding of contemporary jazz. They draw on Gripper's interest in varied genres including folk music and electronic music, as well as jazz.

Gripper studied jazz at Cardiff University, where Huw Warren was a formative influence. He's now established as a pianist, composer and teacher in south-west England. He's a talented composer as well as improviser – not a common combination – and there are some excellent compositions here, all written in 2021-22. The beautifully plangent 'A Song Unsprung' is outstanding, while 'Lament' is an attractive Keith Jarrett-ish piece of melancholia. The trio is wonderfully sympathetic, and the recording is high-quality.

On this evidence, Eddie Gripper is a very talented pianist and composer. There's a striking comparison with Joey Calderazzo's early work, which didn't suggest that he would become one of the outstanding contemporary jazz pianists and a colleague of Branford Marsalis. By contrast, Gripper's album offers immediate promise. He is still early in his career, and this album comes across as a young person's music. I predict interesting developments over the coming years, which I'll be keen to keep track of.

ANDY HAMILTON


Scenes from Childhood
STEPHEN HOUGH
enough
'Riveting and revelatory. Most memoirs give me far more than I want to know – this is the rare sort that left me urgently demanding a second volume, a third, a fourth. I loved it.' PHILIP PULLMAN

***Enough: Scenes from Childhood***
**Stephen Hough**
*Faber & Faber, 272 pages*

It's not fair. A pianist and composer as prodigiously gifted as Stephen Hough really shouldn't be a virtuoso writer too. But here we are. This is what it means to be a polymath, and Hough's new memoir *Enough* (subtitled 'Scenes from Childhood') is written with a tenderness, a truth and a bright-eyed, poetic alertness to the texture of life that'll be recognisable to anyone who enjoys Hough's pianism. 'Here was music that somehow eluded the imprisonment of possession, music that was free because it flew so high,' he writes, describing his first boyhood encounter with Brendel's Schubert, and – as so often in this book – it's all there, an intense emotion captured and expressed in unpretentious words that somehow suggest infinities.

The Schumannesque subtitle is doubly apt. *Enough* isn't so much a conventional narrative as an extended suite of miniatures: a collection of impressions, experiences or reflections distilled into the size and form of one of the newspaper *feuilletons* that Hough collected in his equally readable *Rough Ideas* (Faber & Faber, 2020). It covers his early childhood in Wirral and later Warrington, and his first fumblings in music, religion and sexuality. It follows him through his education at Chetham's School of Music (I've never read a happy account of that school, and Hough does nothing to change matters), the Royal Northern College of Music and finally the Juilliard; and the grungy, grimy, Aids-haunted New York of the early 1980s, where he ends his story with the characteristically optimistic observation that life 'was just beginning'.

The overall effect is like listening to one of Hough's self-curated Piano Albums: his words possess that same ability to capture a moment and hold it to the light in all its iridescent intensity and flavour. The flashes of memory come swiftly and brightly – the smell of Sunday roasts on the air of an English suburb; the coarse yellowing paper of old Soviet sheet music; Choccie the permanently terrified guinea pig (whose coat 'was one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen') – each one richly evocative of time and place.

To declare an interest here: I took my musical baby-steps in West Wirral a generation behind Hough, and can second his recollections of the big houses on Meols Drive, the rattling electric trains and the obligatory friend or neighbour who knew a Beatle. (Mine was a cousin of Paul McCartney who played the horn in Port Sunlight; but Hough's mother shared a hairdresser with Cynthia Lennon.) And, of course, the faintly terrifying piano ladies, like Hough's Hoylake-based teacher Heather Slade-Lipkin, who loomed over our pre-teen musical landscape. We non-pianists rather pitied our keyboard-bound peers. Our youth orchestra brought us friends and fun, while they led a lonely existence in a world where everyone was either a teacher or a competitor.

Or so it seemed anyway, though Hough is so alert, so patient and so perceptive that he makes it seem like a time of wonder, with music providing a vivid counterpoint (Hough is too wise and too generous to set it up in opposition) to the visits to relatives in nicotine-stained sitting rooms, or the suppers of Cheshire cheese toasted with milk and ketchup. Hough is at his most unsparing (to himself, as well as to the reader) when he writes about his deceased parents. It's a testament to his skill and sincerity that we feel so much compassion here, as well as pain.

Of course many readers will be here principally for the music. Fear not: if you ever wondered how Hough acquired that glorious musical sweet tooth – his soft spot for Cécile Chaminade and Amy Woodforde-Finden, his very personal way with Mompou ('the perfect after-dinner truffle'), his sensory delight in the old-school virtuosity of an Earl Wild or an Ossip Gabrilowitsch – you'll find the origin stories in *Enough*, as well as playful, sharply drawn portraits of a vanished generation of piano teachers who grew up in a world where Paderewski was the *beau idéal*. All this from a man who's equally comfortable discussing Catholic theology and the theme tune from *Crossroads*. Irresistible if you come from that time and place; equally irresistible, I suspect, even if you don't. Like I say – it's not fair. **IP**

**RICHARD BRATBY**

*Stephen Hough: virtuoso pianist and writer*

JIYANG CHEN

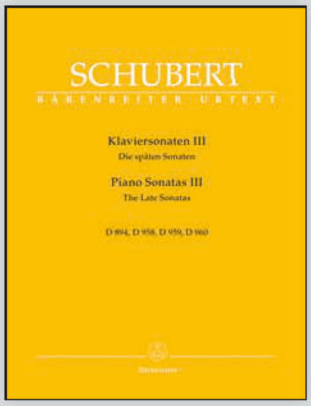
Liszt
Urtext
Ungarische Rhapsodie Nr. 2
Hungarian Rhapsody no. 2
G. Henle Verlag

**Liszt**
Hungarian Rhapsody No 2
*G Henle Verlag HN 803*

Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody* No 2 has always been one of his most celebrated works, existing in versions not only for solo piano but also for piano duet and for eight hands at two pianos, as well as for orchestra. There are several famous abridged and simplified arrangements too, as well as numerous different publications of the solo version to choose from. Interestingly though, Liszt only directly supervised the publication from one house – Ricordi – although many other versions appeared in print during his lifetime. This, along with numerous other fascinating facts about the gestation of the piece, is lucidly outlined in a condensed but informative introductory essay from Mária Eckhardt for this most persuasive and elegantly presented new Henle Verlag edition.

Whereas many Liszt editions tend to superimpose too much editorial 'free licence' on to the text, the pedalling here is carefully presented. Unlike many of the alternative versions available, it includes a pull-out leaf with the cadenza 'add-ons' that Liszt wrote in later years for his pupils Toni Raab and Lina Schmalhausen. In this respect the edition is more enriching than the celebrated and much-loved Peters Edition edited by Emil von Sauer.

In addition to the cadenzas written by Liszt for students, it would have been nice if Henle had also included Rachmaninov's celebrated cadenza. But its omission is understandable: perhaps the sheer scale of this substantial cadenza (and the fact that it was completed decades after Liszt's death) led to the decision to leave it alone. In any case, it is readily available elsewhere. Andreas Groethuysen's fingering is helpful without being overly intrusive, and the critical notes give admirably clear details of the editorial decisions taken.



**Schubert** Piano Sonatas, Volume 3: The Late Sonatas
D894, D958, D959, D960
*Bärenreiter Urtext BA 9644*

Today the late sonatas of Schubert are extremely well established as standard repertory pieces. It is perhaps challenging for us to comprehend just how underplayed, even unknown they once were. As recently as 1934 Rachmaninov reportedly asked Artur Schnabel at the Abbey Road Studios: 'Did Schubert write piano sonatas?'

Of course, it is largely due to the extraordinary advocacy of Schnabel that these timeless masterpieces are now accepted as essential cornerstones of the repertoire. Their 'heavenly length' makes them formidable not only for executants but also for listeners and commentators. Indeed, for generations their innate logic and cohesion were misunderstood simply because they were judged and considered from a Beethovenian yardstick rather than on their own terms. But to play Schubert authoritatively one needs much more than a strong sense of structure. The music requires exceptional poetry and control of phrasing. A Schubertian artist must learn to sing through all the fingertips.

With this lavishly expansive and unedited edition of the last four monumental sonatas, Bärenreiter has unquestionably assisted Schubert connoisseurs, scholars and performers. We now have a state-of-the-art edition that withholds extraneous fingerings and presents the notes Schubert wrote with minimum fuss and great elegance.

Though my much-loved ABRSM 1989 edition of these same sonatas contains sound practical advice, sensible fingerings and commentaries of enormous wisdom from the late Howard Ferguson, it is in the nature of a performing edition rather than an 'urtext'. Even the 2009 Henle Verlag edition (edited by Paul Mies) or the Universal/Wiener Urtext (edited by Martino Tirimo) contain extraneous, if inspiring and welcome elements. If you have to choose just one edition of these vital works, which do you choose? On the one hand, amateur players may find Bärenreiter's lack of editorial suggestions rather intimidating, especially if they do not have an experienced teacher to guide them. It is possible that the lack of practical advice could hinder the amateur player's progress. On the other hand, Bärenreiter's 'blank canvas' could be welcome for those who use scores mainly as a reference tool when listening to performances or recordings. Additionally, for more experienced players this Bärenreiter edition acts as an excellent basis on which to reconsider long-entrenched interpretative approaches that may be up for review.

Not that Bärenreiter's editorial notes and commentaries are spartan; far from it. After fascinating introductions on the works themselves and this edition in particular, there is an invaluable summary from Mario Aschauer on hotly contested or widely discussed issues of performance practice such as staccato/portato differentiation, accents, dynamics, ornamentation, triplets versus dotted rhythms, and changes of speed within movements. The critical commentary index could not be clearer to follow and the music itself is generously laid out over 168 pages.

Having a 'pure' Schubert edition as a springboard is long overdue, though personally I would not want to be without the additional support provided by either Howard Ferguson (ABRSM) or Martino Tirimo (Universal). Ideally every serious music library should make room for all three publications to sit happily on shelves next to each other.

BY MURRAY McLACHLAN

Electrifying: Alexandre Kantorow

SASHA GUSOV

# In concert

## LONDON

**Queen Elizabeth Hall**
**Federico Colli** 23 February
**Alexandre Kantorow** 8 March

'I converse with my heart every day, trying to investigate how to play your music': this is how Federico Colli addresses Mozart in the booklet note for the first volume of a promised survey of the composer's solo piano works for Chandos, and it's in that spirit that he played two of the Fantasias at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall. The bare octave that opens the Fantasia in C minor, K475, was left to resonate for 12 seconds – which felt like an eternity – after which we went on a vertiginous journey, with volatile changes of colour and mood punctuated by theatrical pauses. If this was how Mozart improvised, Colli honoured it by turning it into his own musical stream of consciousness, and by bringing to it a range of touch from the ferocious to the exquisitely delicate. He also played the rarely performed Fantasia in C minor, K396, but couldn't disguise this work's haphazard structure, which reflects its tangled origins.

After playing Maria Grinberg's solo piano arrangement of Schubert's Fantasia in F minor, D940 – and managing to limit the diminution of its four-hand richness of texture – Colli devoted the rest of his programme to Prokofiev, a composer he plans to record soon. And if these accounts of *Visions fugitives* and Tatiana Nikolayeva's charming piano version of *Peter and the Wolf* are anything to go by, his Prokofiev on record should be as original as his Mozart. His performance of *Visions fugitives* had an unusual boldness, and his slight re-ordering of the pieces gave the work a more forceful ending.

Many pianists gesticulate, but Colli's gesturing is an art form in itself. During pauses his hands flutter like swallows, sometimes swooping down almost to the keyboard then soaring up again, as though having second thoughts before landing on a fastidiously placed chord. This seems to be a visual preparation both for himself and his audience, before the next surprise in store.

Sadly, the hall for Colli was two-thirds empty. But for Alexandre Kantorow it was full, and with his programme of Brahms (the C major Piano Sonata, Op 1) and Schubert (a handful of Liszt's song arrangements followed by the *Wanderer Fantasy*) this young French virtuoso didn't disappoint his admirers. Kantorow has just recorded this programme for BIS, completing his survey of the three piano sonatas coupled with other composers' music, so this recital served as an appetising taster.

Kantorow brought to Brahms's First Sonata all the composer's youthful exuberance, tearing along with a Beethovenian roar as the work took off, and beautifully setting up the contrasting mode of meditative delicacy that acts as a counterweight throughout the opening *Allegro*. His Scherzo was swashbuckling, and in the waves of rapid staccato chords in the finale the piano seemed to stutter in its excitement. The only disappointment for me was the *Andante*, in which Kantorow didn't dramatise the contrast in the question-and-answer relationship between the theme and its ghostly echo, which should be the most poetic moment of the work.

In Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy*, D760, memories of whose opening lurk behind that of Brahms's First Sonata, Kantorow covered all the bases from electrifying energy to sweet sadness. The rest of his recital consisted of five Liszt arrangements of Schubert songs, where he caught the poetry of the singing voice emerging out of the surrounding darkness in 'Der Wanderer' and the eloquent tenor pervading 'Der Müller und der Bach'. And when Liszt's mostly respectful treatment of Schubert's accompaniments took virtuoso flight, the laid-back Kantorow was ready for that too.

Colli's final encore was Fazıl Say's jazz treatment of Mozart's 'Rondo alla turca'; Kantorow's final encore (after a wonderful account of Cziffra's *Valse triste*) was Arcadi Volodos's more refined but no less spectacular take on the same piece. Small world.

MICHAEL CHURCH

**International Piano**

**CHOOSE YOUR PACKAGE**

# SUBSCRIBE TODAY

**Never miss an issue of *International Piano*.**
**There are three fantastic subscription options to choose from!**

## THE PREMIUM PACKAGE

INTERNATIONAL PIANO

### PRINT & DIGITAL

**Our premium subscription option is a must-have for every piano enthusiast.** Combining both our print and digital subscription packages into one, our premium package is the most comprehensive and cost-effective way to enjoy ***International Piano***.

- 10 print issues each year, delivered directly to your door
- 10 digital issues, available to read on your phone, tablet or digital devices
- Access to our digital archive, allowing you to explore every issue of *International Piano* since 2012

**From £7.62** every month

BEST VALUE
International Piano
No. 81 • April 2022
www.international-piano.com
EXPERT ADVICE FOR EVERY PIANO ENTHUSIAST
INSIDE 13 PAGES OF FREE SHEET MUSIC
IGOR LEVIT
Eclectic virtuoso and piano activist
£6.50

## INDIVIDUAL SUBSCRIPTION PACKAGES

International Piano
No. 81 • April 2022
www.international-piano.com
EXPERT ADVICE FOR EVERY PIANO ENTHUSIAST
INSIDE 13 PAGES OF FREE SHEET MUSIC
IGOR LEVIT
Eclectic virtuoso and piano activist
A NEW LEASE OF LIFE
Special focus on the Gilmore Festival
TWO'S COMPANY
What makes a great song pianist?
£6.50
PLUS Musicians around the world respond to events in Ukraine
Martin Roscoe on Schubert's Impromptu in B-flat major

INTERNATIONAL PIANO

### PRINT

10 issues per year

**From £5.95**
every month

INTERNATIONAL PIANO

### DIGITAL

10 digital issues, plus digital archive

**From £5.95**
every month

## Three easy ways to subscribe

**magsubscriptions.com/international-piano** **+44 (0)1722 716997** **subscriptions@markallengroup.com**

**Stated subscription rates are based on a monthly credit card payment. Annual rate by credit or debit card is £66.00 for print; £66.00 for digital; or £86.00 for print & digital. Postage and packaging is not included for overseas orders and will be applied at checkout. If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com**

The Starry Night, 1889
The Starry
XXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXX

# Live Review

*Lara Melda plunges into a pianistic paintbox*

## LONDON

**Lara Melda**
**Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience**
Spitalfields, London
9 February

We're sitting in Vincent van Gogh's bedroom in Arles. Colour cascades across walls, filling etched lines with the post-impressionist's sunflower yellows and iris blues. The window opens and butterflies dance in to the rhythm of *Gnossienne* No 1, performed by pianist Lara Melda, winner of BBC Young Musician of the Year in 2010 and currently artist-in-residence at 'Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience' in London. A train rushes out of its painting and around the room, let loose by *Gnossienne* No 3. This is for the Harry Potter generation, but one suspects that Satie would have approved. Although the graphics are a permanent part of this exhibition, it feels as though they were created especially for this music – that's testament to Melda's programme, which comprises repertoire that Van Gogh likely heard in his lifetime.

Much is made of the Dutch painter's connection with music, evidence for which is found in his correspondence that often references parallels between the art forms. In *Van Gogh and Music* (Yale University Press) Natascha Veldhorst points to the artist's comparison of intensifying colours as Wagner embellished orchestral timbres, while the sunflower studies are presented as a 'symphony in blue and yellow'. His interest was practical, too: he took piano lessons from Hein van der Zanden, who found the procedure frustrating due to Van Gogh's obsession with translating musical tone into colour on canvas. Another Zanden pupil, Anton Kerssemakers, is quoted as observing: 'Van Gogh was continually comparing the sounds made by the piano to Prussian blue, and dark green or dark ochre to bright cadmium, so that the good man thought he was confronted with a lunatic, and grew so afraid of him that he called a halt to the lessons.'

Melda plunges into the paintbox. 'Un sospiro' from Liszt's three *Études de concert* plays as a peacock moth flaps her wings; 'Clair de lune' accompanies a swirling starry night. Clearly, this is not an average recital: for one thing, the audience is seated on deckchairs and beanbags. For another, screens are an essential part of the experience – Melda plays flawlessly into dozens of cameraphones that encircle the Bechstein, on loan from local piano house Jaques Samuel. The second movement from Beethoven's 'Tempest' Sonata – heard alongside a series of Van Gogh's self-portraits and suggestions of hospital confinement – closes the concert.

I'd half-expected a bloodied bandage or the sound of a shotgun – the rest of 'Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience' tends to fetishise the painter's illness. Reviews for this internationally travelling exhibition, which includes projections of a vase that moves through multiple still lifes and a virtual-reality tour through wheatfields and villages, are mixed. One often-made criticism is that there are no original artworks included – I went via the National Gallery in preparation. Perhaps the perfect solution would be a follow-up to Melda's excellent recital in Room 43.

**CLAIRE JACKSON**

Rhinegold Jobs

THE UK'S LEADING Music & Performing Arts RECRUITMENT PLATFORM

FIND YOUR NEXT ROLE WITH US TODAY

Music Directors to piano tutors, from graduate roles to industry veterans, we cover the entire spectrum of the music & performing arts industry

LET US DO THE WORK

Job alerts send the latest vacancies straight to you

Upload your CV and our recruiters will find you

Sign-up today at RHINEGOLDJOBS.CO.UK

MA Education

---

International Piano

# NEXT ISSUE MAY 2023

ON SALE 26 APR

## UNDERSTATED VIRTUOSO

**Zlata Chochieva** talks about what inspired her latest album, 'Im Freien', featuring music both familiar and obscure

## DISCOVERING HENSELT

Daniel Grimwood talks to Jeremy Nicholas about a 19th-century composer whose piano music is ripe for revival

## A GUIDE TO LIGETI'S ÉTUDES

Jed Distler explores these modern classics and their distinguished history on record

## SCHARWENKA'S BEETHOVEN

A look at Xaver Scharwenka's duet transcriptions of Beethoven's symphonies

INTERVIEW BY JEREMY NICHOLAS

# Musical heroes

The Irish pianist and composer **Philip Martin** fondly recalls music that has inspired him

JULIA MARTIN PHOTOGRAPHY

John Browning's recording of the Barber Concerto was the one and only when I was studying it in the late '60s. I heard it and I thought 'My goodness!' It really was an inspiration. His playing of it was just brilliant. Barber didn't write it for him. It was dedicated to a man called Manfred Ibel – I don't know who he is – but it's the most stunning piece. A wonderful concerto. I was handed it by another Irish pianist named Florence Ryan. Here, she said. This is not for me. Very generous of her. I just fell in love with it. Practised it like hell. I think I worked on it more than any other work, because it's hard. Difficult. I played the first performance of it in Ireland in 1968 – the RTÉ Orchestra in Dublin – and I played it with BBC orchestras and then abroad. It was *my* concerto for a bit. That's what I felt. It was mine, you know? Beautiful work. The second movement is to die for.

Rubinstein came to Dublin and my mother and I went off to hear him in the Gaiety. We had bad seats, stuck behind a pillar looking out round the side half the night. But I remember every note he played. *Carnaval* was very much his piece – well, he could do anything, couldn't he? Beautiful. Then some Debussy and Villa-Lobos. That was a gorgeous evening. The only disappointing thing was that I went to go and meet him backstage and this very officious creature said he's not seeing anyone. Bog off, you know? So we did. Later in life, I wrote to him and had a lovely letter back (written on Christmas Day!) saying next time I'm in London come and see me after the concert. Well, in 1970 Louis Kentner took me as a pupil – I was in seventh heaven and remained so for another eight years – and I know it sounds stupid but I thought I'd better not go and meet Rubinstein because what would Mr Kentner think? So I never met him! There's no one like Rubinstein. The playing is beautiful. There's no one to beat him really. For me, it was always Rubinstein and Horowitz when I was growing up. I dropped Horowitz later on!

I was introduced to Kentner by Margaret Reizenstein, the widow of Franz Reizenstein who I'd been studying composition with privately while I was at the [Royal] Academy [of Music]. I thought he'd been dead years but she said no, he's living in Chelsea. He'd be perfect for you. The other thing was that Kentner was my mother's favourite pianist. She used to talk about him when I was a child. 'Listen to his soft playing,' she would say. Kentner was wonderful. He never charged me a penny. He came out with some fascinating things, like in the cadenza of the first movement of the Tchaikovsky concerto, where he said 'This is where the audience will start to cough'. Not with me, I said. Then, soon after, I played it in the Royal Albert Hall. The audience started coughing in the cadenza! I studied a lot of Liszt with Kentner including the *Bénédiction* and that always brings back wonderful memories of him. I just love that piece.

I came across the LP of Van Cliburn's live recording of Rach 3 when I was in Dublin and I got it home and wore it out. I played it over and over again, four or five times a day. To my mind it will forever be *the* performance of this work. There's no one to touch him playing it. I used to think how note-perfect it was, but as time went on I realised, no, it was not that perfect. But initially, you don't notice anything wrong because of the way he plays it. It's gorgeous. It's big, fast playing and you can hear everything.

Wearing my composer's hat now, I think Walton's First Symphony is possibly one of the five greatest English symphonies. It's a stunning work. There's a funny connection here too: I believe Reizenstein was Walton's best man. Everyone's connected, aren't they? He was writing a third symphony for Previn. I've got a facsimile of the first roughly eight notes he sent saying 'How about this, André?' What makes him such a great composer? Rhythm, melody, harmony. I don't think you can beat those three things. I heard Previn conduct the First Symphony in the Royal Festival Hall sometime in the '70s. He had an empathy with that type of music. **IP**

**Barber**
**Piano Concerto**
John Browning
*Sony Classical 88697 52989-2*

**Schumann**
**Carnaval**
Arthur Rubinstein
*RCA 09026 63051-2*

**Liszt**
**Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude**
Louis Kentner
*APR APR5514*

**Rachmaninov**
**Piano Concerto No 3**
Van Cliburn; Moscow PO / Kirill Kondrashin
*Testament SBT1440*

**Walton**
**Symphony No 1**
LSO / André Previn
*RCA GD87830*

GRAMOPHONE

# CENTENARY ISSUE OUT NOW!

Our April edition contains a major celebration of the history of recording as told and explored through the pages of *Gramophone* – including a special archive section – as well as looking at the artists and developments shaping classical music recording today.

SPECIAL CENTENARY COLLECTORS' EDITION
THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS
Est 1923 · APRIL 2023
GRAMOPHONE
gramophone.co.uk
GRAMOPHONE 100
CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF RECORDED CLASSICAL MUSIC
UNITED KINGDOM £9.95

## This special issue includes:

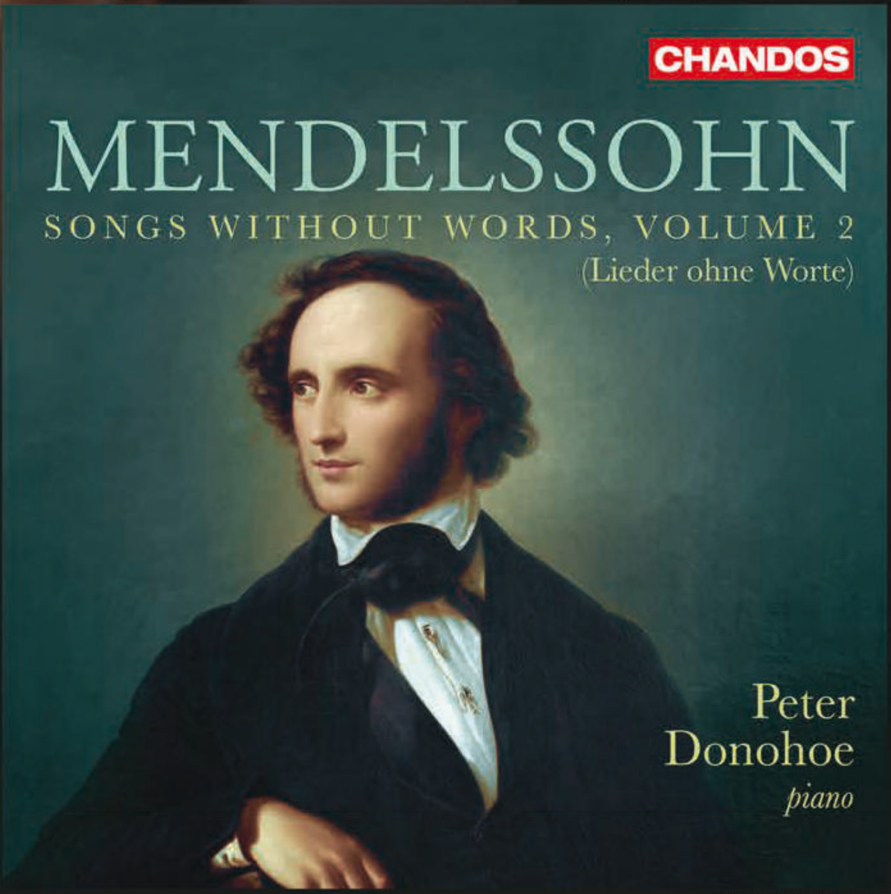
- A 24-page feature about the history of *Gramophone* and classical recording
- A 44-page special archive section reproducing some of the most fascinating articles from our past century
- Other special centenary articles include our reissues expert Rob Cowan on the importance of listening to historic recordings, and a look at young artists shaping music-making today

**SAVE 30% ON SUBSCRIPTIONS WITH CODE G100P**

magsubscriptions.com/G100P ☎ +44 (0)1722 716997 @ subscriptions@markallengroup.com

CHANDOS
THE SOUND OF CLASSICAL

## Available 14/4/23


CHANDOS
MENDELSSOHN
SONGS WITHOUT WORDS, VOLUME 2
(Lieder ohne Worte)
Peter
Donohoe
piano

CHAN 20267

**This album completes Peter Donohoe's survey of the Songs without Words, coupled with the Variations sérieuses, Phantasie on 'The Last Rose of Summer' and Rachmaninoff's transcription of the Scherzo from A Midsummer Night's Dream**

## Already Available

CHANDOS
MENDELSSOHN
SONGS WITHOUT WORDS, VOLUME 1
(Lieder ohne Worte)
Peter
Donohoe
piano

CHAN 20252

'A great record, recommended without reservation. If further issues in this series maintain this standard, the final set will be very hard to beat.' - *Musical Opinion*

'Donohoe's art of differentiation, his sensitive, nuanced and always wide awake touch, his outstanding technique and art of phrasing make each of the small compositions a glittery bijou' - *Pizzicato*

WWW.CHANDOS.NET
[MP3 • LOSSLESS • STUDIO • SURROUND]
[CD • SACD]

Spotify
Listen on MUSIC
EUROPADISC
prestomusic

STAY IN THE KNOW
YouTube